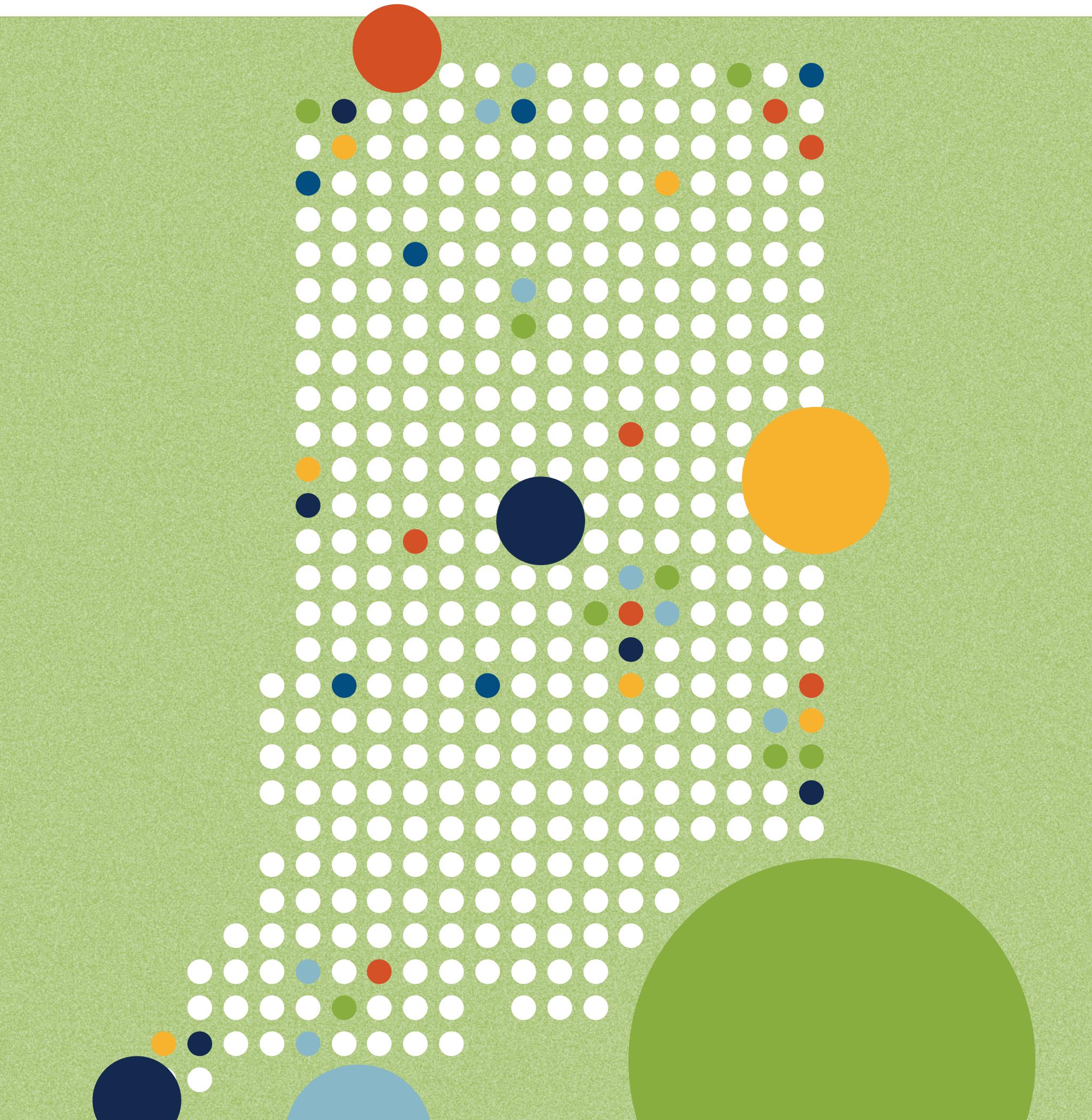


INDIANA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP

2023

ENTREPRENEURSHIP INDIANA



DO YOU KNOW AN
ENTREPRENEUR WHO
SHOULD BE **FEATURED**?
HELP US SHOWCASE
THEM IN NEXT YEAR'S
YEARBOOK.
NOMINATE THEM TODAY.

ENTREPRENEURSHIPINDIANA.COM



TAKE WHAT
YOU FIND
HERE AND
MAKE IT
**BETTER AND
BETTER.**"

—COLONEL ELI LILLY



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ECONOMIC IMPACT

This project used the services of sixteen Hoosier small business owners and freelancers paying them more than \$140,000 in creative fees. The funds enabled these entrepreneurs to buy new equipment, invest in their studios and marketing materials, start new ventures, and grow their teams, hire accountants and assistants.

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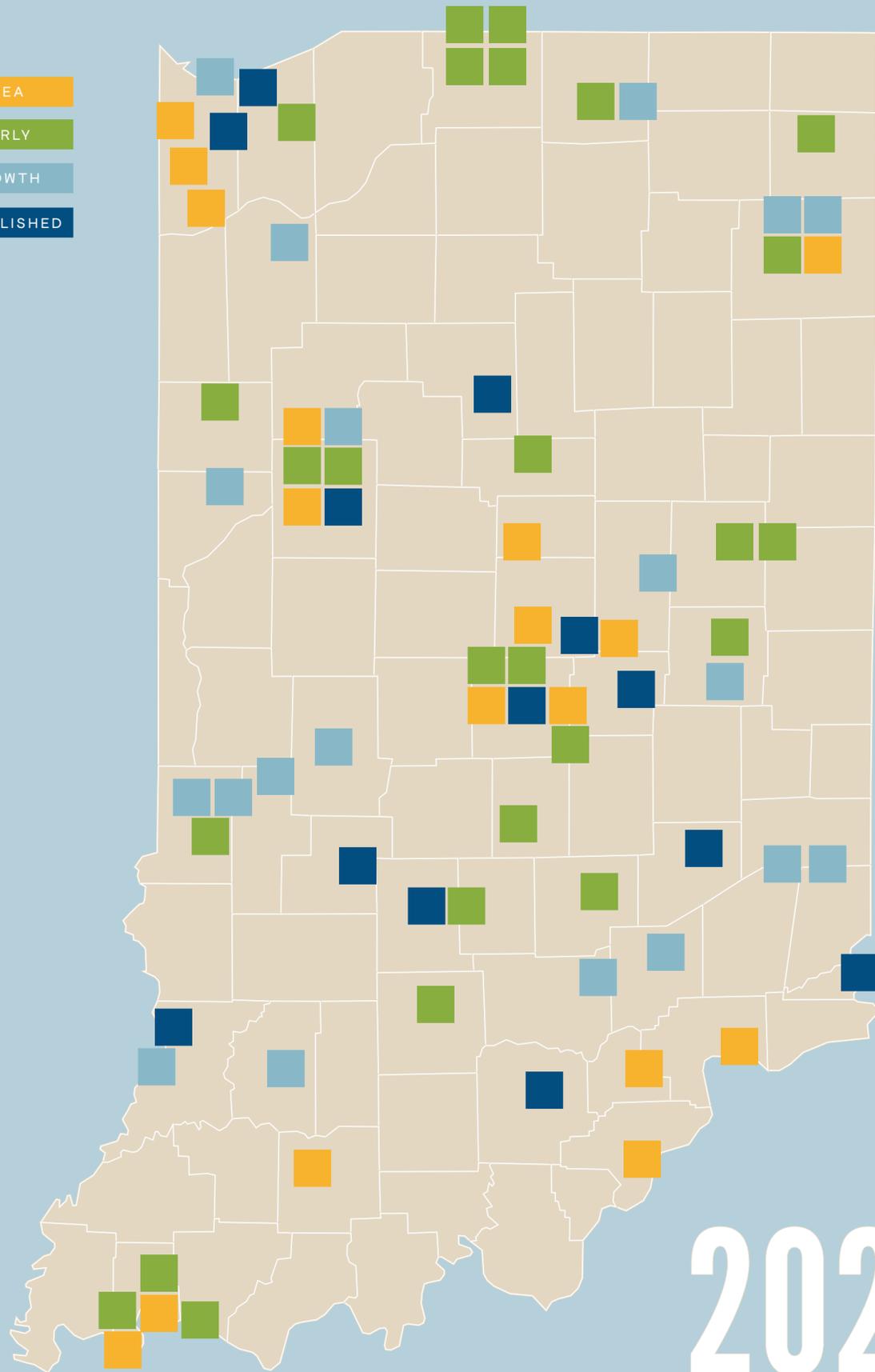
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“THE ABILITY TO PREDICT NEEDS, CREATE SOLUTIONS AND DREAM BIG IS A MINDSET WE SHARE WITH ENTREPRENEURS. LIKE COLONEL ELI LILLY, JAMES ALLISON, JUSTIN ZIMMER AND CLESSIE CUMMINS, OUR FOCUS, DRIVE AND AMBITION ARE FUELED BY THE NEXT 100 YEARS, NOT JUST THE NEXT 10.”
—DAVID ROSENBERG

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“

WE ENVISION A ROBUST AND PROSPEROUS ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE THAT INSPIRES INNOVATION, FUELS INGENUITY AND POWERS THE WORLD AROUND US.”

THE HOOSIER WAY

EDITOR'S LETTER

IN INDIANA, WE LIKE TO SAY THAT WE'RE FOCUSED ON BUILDING THE ECONOMY WE WANT, NOT JUST THE ONE THAT HAPPENS *TO US*.

We envision a robust and prosperous economy of the future that inspires innovation, fuels ingenuity and powers the world around us – one that fosters community, attracts talent, creates boundless opportunities and betters the lives of Hoosiers for generations to come.

This ability to predict needs, create solutions and dream big is a mindset we share with entrepreneurs. Like Colonel Eli Lilly, James Allison, Justin Zimmer and Clessie Cummins, our focus, drive and ambition are fueled by the next 100 years, not just the next 10. With tenacity and relentlessness, that one small thought, product or solution grows from a humble beginning to an unstoppable force, lifting up innovation, industry, people and communities alongside it.

That's why we're investing in the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem like never before. Because we know that the entrepreneurs of our past, present and future – the dreamers, the risk takers and the innovators – are Indiana's greatest asset. You are our greatest asset.

We are proud to introduce the second annual edition of Entrepreneurship Indiana in celebration of your countless contributions and successes.

Here, you'll find spotlights on established and rising Hoosier entrepreneurs: stories of trailblazers, tales of triumph, and records of resilience and sacrifice, cultivated by and for the entrepreneurial community.

You'll hear from creators, community builders, tech developers, service providers and more who are investing in themselves and their businesses and, in turn, honing their future and disrupting their industry. Each entrepreneur is unique, yet each is creating an impact that will be seen and felt throughout our neighborhoods and across Indiana for years to come.

We are confident that, like us, you'll be inspired by this community and take that risk, launch that new idea, or support Indiana's entrepreneurs. And, perhaps most importantly, you'll leave inspired to lean in even further to our robust and incredibly rare entrepreneurial ecosystem where, despite the competition, our entrepreneurs are lifting each other up, learning from one another and reinvesting in their communities.

That is, after all, the Hoosier way.

David Rosenberg
Secretary of Commerce

Ann Lathrop
Chief Strategy Officer

Connect IND

THE FRONT DOOR TO INDIANA'S ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

GET STARTED

1

Create your account:
Provide your email and a password to get started.

2

Request an Ecosystem Navigator:
You'll receive an email within one business day from your Navigator to connect individually. You can message with each other, share files and talk back and forth privately.

3

Get matched with resources:
Complete a four question survey to immediately receive a customized list of resources to help meet your most pressing needs.



“THE STATE’S ENTREPRENEURSHIP PORTAL IS A GREAT SOLUTION TO ADDRESS GAPS IN OUR STARTUP AND SMALL BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM, AND IT WILL CREATE ACCESSIBILITY AND CONNECTIONS TO RESOURCES THAT WE’VE YET TO SEE IN OUR COMMUNITY.”

—BRIGID MORRISSEY, CO-FOUNDER OF THE ROOT, A COWORKING SPACE IN NEW ALBANY, INDIANA

With over 4,000 resources, a state-wide event calendar and different pathways to get matched with relevant connections, entrepreneurs in the state of Indiana now have their ecosystem at their fingertips.

Translating Hoosier hospitality to an online space is no simple feat but the team behind ConnectIND intentionally built a platform to reflect the Hoosier mentality while treating the platform like a lean startup itself.

Morgan Allen, Director of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems at the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), explains how ConnectIND came to be, “The idea was conceptualized in mid-2022. We began working with Ecomap Technologies in 2022 to develop the portal and worked with them for a year to ensure the software tool met our needs. Over the course of the year, we hosted a series of beta tests around the state. In total, we gathered input from 300 entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial support organizations to build a platform that they would actually be excited about! We got feedback on how information should be presented, in what ways entrepreneurs engage with it, and how they navigate the platform without getting lost or stuck. We know that just having the resources available online is not enough. More than just available, they need to be accessible.”

ConnectIND officially launched in June 2023 and in the first four months alone, here's what happened:

- 800 users created accounts
- On average, users spend more than an hour on the platform (70 minutes).
- The site registered over 30,000 visits.
- Over 1,000 curated matches were facilitated.

THE ECOSYSTEM AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

On ConnectIND, entrepreneurs have direct access to a personal concierge - an Ecosystem Navigator - that helps them explore the ecosystem. These Ecosystem Navigators connect users with the right resources at the right time and provide one-on-one individual support to the entrepreneurs in their area.

To fully leverage the platform, users can answer a four-question survey to receive a curated list of resources to solve their most urgent and relevant issues. These curated lists are a great starting point to explore the platform and immediately get going.

While the platform is built to provide localized support, it's also designed to help entrepreneurs connect across the state. A statewide event calendar curates all startup- and entrepreneur-relevant events in different parts of Indiana to expand access and overcome county lines when it comes to connecting with other business owners.

FEATURES TO LOOK FORWARD TO

The current version of ConnectIND is what founders would call the minimum viable product. The team at EcoMap Technologies and the Indiana Economic Development Corporation will add new features in the coming months.

Most recently, the platform was updated for translation to be available in the eleven languages that are most commonly spoken in Indiana. Another new feature to be excited about is a learning management system that will provide self-paced on-demand workshops and trainings for Indiana entrepreneurs.

In the new year, ConnectIND will roll out a list of service providers (lawyers, CPAs, banks etc.) that are vetted by other entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial support organizations. While not directly endorsed by IEDC, these service providers have a track record of working with local founders and present a starting point for other users.

Lastly, by leveraging the power of artificial intelligence, a chatbot feature will boost the current concierge service to better leverage the knowledge of the Ecosystem Navigators.

MEET YOUR EGOSYSTEM NAVIGATORS



VIRGINIA CAUDILL

I'm a semi-retired attorney who has spent almost my entire 30-year career working with small businesses.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A NAVIGATOR?

The chance to keep small-town Indiana alive.



DANIELLE POWELL

My close friends describe me as a professional social butterfly, skilled in building meaningful relationships. With over 10 years as an independent restaurant operator, I prioritize technology and systems for exceptional service and employee support.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A NAVIGATOR?

I strongly believe that everyone should find their unique contribution to society. If everyone were to add just one act of service for others, we would have a more balanced ecosystem.



TIM BRANYAN

Proud USAF combat veteran turned successful serial entrepreneur, motivated by helping others achieve their goals.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A NAVIGATOR?

The opportunity to combine my passion for helping people with my deep interest in contributing to the mission of economic development.



KIMBERLY JANELLE

I am a serial entrepreneur, with my first business starting at 19. I am a certified tax nerd, obsessed with the tax code and how it benefits business owners.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A NAVIGATOR?

I am most excited about discovering all the gems in this city that can enhance the lives of entrepreneurs that live here!



MIKE FULKERSON

Before joining the Indiana SBDC, I spent nearly two decades in the food and beverage CPG industry. I've been a partner in multiple food and beverage startups and have launched numerous perishable products from ideation stage to nationwide retail distribution.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A NAVIGATOR?

This role allows me to build bridges, cultivate our region, and connect our state's many great resources with the entrepreneurs who need them the most.



JARED ELL

I am a family man, community member, passionate entrepreneurship cheerleader, and a dedicated nerd. My professional career has revolved around marketing and IT, serving both large and small organizations.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A NAVIGATOR?

I believe in the exponential impact that entrepreneurs can have on our community, and I enjoy connecting dreamers, doers, influencers, and change-makers to the communities they hold dear.



ERIC BESCHINSKI

My background is diverse and spans various industries, ranging from food service and construction to financial services and real estate investing. Most importantly, I have been an entrepreneur for nearly 20 years.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS A NAVIGATOR?

I love entrepreneurship and I love systems. So, connecting entrepreneurs to the resources and systems that will help them grow and thrive thoroughly excites me.

ACCESSIBILITY VS AVAILABILITY

“WHEN I FIRST ATTENDED STARTUP EVENTS IN THE EARLY 2010’S, I WAS OFTEN THE ONLY BLACK PERSON IN THE ROOM. I DIDN’T WEAR SKINNY JEANS NOR PENNY LOAFERS, I STILL DON’T DRINK CRAFT BEER AND MY BEDTIME IS 8.30 P.M.”

I realized that if I didn’t fit in, then an older person, a single parent or someone who didn’t already run in these circles probably wouldn’t feel comfortable either. It occurred to me that while resources were technically available, they certainly weren’t accessible to all. If the cost, location and time required to access a resource are prohibitive, it’s not accessible. If the resource was not designed with the end-user, their cultural DNA and their day-to-day experience in mind, it’s not accessible. And if it’s not accessible, it continues to exacerbate the status quo of inequity and under-optimization rather than move the country, our economy and communities forward”, Dell Gines, Senior Community Development Advisor, International Economic Development Council.

Now in the fourth wave of economic development, according to Dell Gines, the concept of entrepreneurship ecosystem building is evolving from its origins in Silicon Valley (Ecosystem Building 1.0) toward a more equitable development approach (Ecosystem Building 3.0).

- 1.0
ECOSYSTEM BUILDING 1.0
 Focus on high-growth, tech startups

- 2.0
ECOSYSTEM BUILDING 2.0
 Expansion into the more conventional entrepreneurship space including main street and small businesses, local chambers of commerce and traditional economic development organization

- 3.0
ECOSYSTEM BUILDING 3.0
 Recognition of the need for greater equity in the ecosystem model to ensure under-optimized areas and entrepreneurs fully benefit from entrepreneurial opportunity

WHERE DOES ENTREPRENEURSHIP FIT INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

1930S INDUSTRIAL RECRUITMENT

1980S ENTREPRENEURSHIP & SMALL BIZ STRATEGIES

1990S CLUSTERS

2010S ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEMS

ECOSYSTEM BUILDING

3.0

Following the devastating impact of COVID 19 on local economies, early statistics confirmed what underserved entrepreneurs had experienced first-hand for decades: The rate of venture capital investment into Black- or Hispanic-owned startups hovered below 3%, lower even for Black and Hispanic women entrepreneurs. The playing field was - and remains - far from level.

Dell Gines explains, “By definition, if you optimize something, that means it’s working better: It’s producing more and it’s more durable. But when you have large parts of the population - women and diverse populations in under-optimized geographies - then the only logical outcome is an under-optimized economy. It produces less, it adds less to GDP than it could, and it’s decreasing the potential quality of life that we strive for in America.”

According to a report by CITI Global Perspectives & Solutions, this under-optimization due to racial inequality alone has cost the American economy \$16 trillion dollars over the last twenty years (CITI Global Perspectives & Solutions, September 2020). If we closed this racial wealth gap today, \$5 trillion could be added to the U.S. GDP over the next five years.

Dell Gines argues, “Equitable development means ensuring that people have access to the opportunity to create or sustain themselves in their communities through the process of economic production. One of the ways to do that in a capitalist, market-based economy like ours is to participate in that marketplace by providing a product or service that generates profit and, ultimately, wealth.

This opportunity, that is fundamental to the American spirit, has not been made available to large swaths of the American people. We’re not just talking about racialized minorities but also women; we’re talking about geographical differences, especially when you start getting into rural, small, rural communities. We’ve been evangelizing on the importance of equitable ecosystem building, but we’ve done a poor job of actually putting in place the programs and policies to strategically implement a more equitable approach.”

“If you give people the means to participate in the marketplace through entrepreneurial activity, you give them the capability of generating profit and, ultimately, wealth. Entrepreneurship is a proven mechanism for economic productivity and functions as a systemic lever to eliminate poverty.”

The prerequisite to making resources accessible, not only available, is a deep understanding of the cultural background and day-to-day lived experience of the entrepreneurial talent that we’re hoping to serve and activate. This responsibility expands to all actors in an ecosystem, from support providers and economic developers to mentors, investors and funders. Ecosystem Building 3.0 holds the promise of closing not only the wealth gap but the opportunity gap among entrepreneurs, and equitable development is the way to get there.

GDP OF YOUNG COMPANIES

WRITTEN BY ANIKA HORN

KEY INSIGHTS

1

Entrepreneurial GDP: Employer companies under the age of five years contributed \$11.5 billion to Indiana's GDP in 2022.

2

Rural entrepreneurship: Among the top ten counties with the highest entrepreneurial GDP (as part of overall GDP), five were rural.

3

The value of connectedness: Communities with high levels of connectedness accelerate their entrepreneurs' revenue twice as fast.



YOU CAN THRIVE ANYWHERE AS AN ENTREPRENEUR IN INDIANA.” –MATT KINGHORN

THE HOOSIER ROAD AHEAD

For the coming years IBRC and IEDC have set their goals even higher. Carol Rogers explains, “In this first round of data analysis, we were only able to capture data for employer-firms that are less than five years old. Because of the complexity of sources, we were not yet able to include sole proprietors in our calculation. The Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates 650,000 to 700,000 sole proprietors in the state of Indiana. Once we have more data on their age and sales volumes, we might be able to include them in our assessment.”

Morgan Allen, at the Indiana Economic Development Corporation adds, “As the workforce becomes more productive through automation and technological advances such as artificial intelligence (AI), job creation is no longer the best indicator of success. I believe that economic productivity will take the lead as an economic success indicator, and that’s measured in GDP. Knowing what portion of GDP comes from Indiana’s young businesses will not only help policy makers and communities realize how important these local companies are; it will prove to the entrepreneurs themselves that their growing pains and risks are not in vain. It demonstrates what we’ve had a gut feeling about for years: that entrepreneurship in Indiana - rural or urban - is a powerful driver for community prosperity, wellbeing and a great quality of life.”

In 2022, Indiana’s employer companies under the age of five contributed \$11.5 billion to the state’s overall economy. Beyond their impact on economic productivity, these young companies invest directly in the quality of life of Indiana communities. And the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) has the data to prove it.

“Growth Domestic Product (GDP) is a measure of the size and health of an economy as a whole. It accounts for factors such as employee compensation and benefits, owners’ profit and taxes that are paid, thereby investing in public services. Put simply, GDP is a good indicator for the economic vitality of a community and tells us a lot about the positive impact that new businesses (less than five years old) have on their workers and - by extension - on their communities.”, explains Matt Kinghorn, Senior Analyst at the Indiana Business Research Center (IBRC).

In 2022, the Indiana Economic Development Corporation launched a collaboration with IBRC to find out just how much young companies contributed to the economic vitality of the state as a whole. With a longitudinal data set from 2017 through the present, Matt and his colleagues were able to track economic productivity among young companies pre-, during and post-pandemic.

Carol Rogers, Director of the Indiana Business Research Center, explains the power of the data, “The data gives us some insights into what interventions make the greatest difference in supporting company survival and growth during these first crucial years. Once we correct for overall economic trends, we can discern where in the journey tailored training, investment, networking or policy change boost young businesses’ resilience. In addition, we are able to map the young companies and their contribution to GDP by county giving us localized insight into how these businesses improve the quality of life and their local economy, county by county.”



ECONOMIC GROWTH AND INNOVATION DON’T ONLY TAKE PLACE IN INDIANA’S METROPOLITAN AREAS. RURAL ENTREPRENEURS ARE AS IMPACTFUL AS THOSE IN URBAN INDIANA.”

–CAROL ROGERS

MILESTONE 01

IDEA

ARDHIO

AARON LASTER IS MAKING REAL ESTATE INVESTING ACCESSIBLE.

AARON LASTER

01	INDIANAPOLIS	City
02	2021	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	ARDHIO.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY LAURA MCPHEE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Esther Boston*

Since the early 1900s, real estate has been one of the most conventional ways to build financial wealth in the U.S. However, access to the real estate market and the opportunity it presents for financial gain has traditionally been enjoyed by those with significant capital and social position. Thanks to Indianapolis native Aaron Laster, this is slowly beginning to change.

Laster is creating a digital platform to facilitate fractional investing, which allows diversification rather than relying on a few industries or products to generate a return. He was awarded funding from Be Nimble's Idea-Stage Accelerator in 2021, which he used to develop Ardhio — a tool to widen the variety of real estate investments available to investors of more modest means, while stabilizing the investments for higher overall returns.

"Traditionally, only about 10% of people in this country had access to real estate investing in a way that could create wealth," says Laster, who was named to Indiana Business Journal's "20 in their Twenties" list in 2021. "My goal is to make it possible for the rest of us, the other 90%, to do the same. Ardhio allows investors to buy, sell and manage fractional ownership shares in real estate through our user-friendly investor dashboard."

Laster became interested in the real estate market as a freshman at Indiana University, investing in single-family and small multifamily properties in Indianapolis by taking advantage of seller financing offers. By the time he

“MY GOAL IS TO MAKE IT [REAL ESTATE INVESTING] POSSIBLE FOR THE REST OF US, THE OTHER 90%, TO DO THE SAME.”

graduated and moved back home, he already owned several properties throughout the city through his firm, RL Holdings. Now, he's a development fellow at Merchants Affordable Housing helping to address affordable housing barriers.

"I have realized how important it is for us to meaningfully impact as many people as we can by developing tools that will democratize real estate investing," says Laster.

With grant money from the Be Nimble Foundation Accelerator Program for Black and Brown founders and the Indiana Technical Assistance Program (INTAP), Laster has been able to grow Ardhio into a working platform. At every step of the way, Laster says he has relied on the advice and experiences of his mentors — Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity brother and Carlisle Realty Group CEO Marquez Carlisle, and Be Nimble Foundation Co-founder Kelli Jones.

"Over the next two years, the goal is to have over 50 doors [property units] fractionalized on the platform," says Laster. "Right now we are working on all of the compliance and registration processes with the required government agencies to open up these opportunities digitally to everyone."

“WE'RE HELPING TO IMPROVE THE FOOD CULTURE IN EVANSVILLE BY HAVING MORE VARIETY AND DIVERSITY IN FOODS.”

BEDFORD COLLAB

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs*

HELPS FOOD ENTREPRENEURS GET A HEAD START.

In 2017, serial entrepreneur DeAndre Wilson and co-founder Jeff Gott launched Turn Table, a catering business, out of his home, but soon required a full-blown commercial kitchen. When the local co-op kitchen he joined closed amid management challenges, Wilson and partner Merrick Korach set out to create a new shared kitchen.

Bedford Collab is set to launch in 2023. "We'll be meeting the needs of food entrepreneurs for shared prep and storage facilities," Wilson says. "We're also helping to improve the food culture in Evansville by having more variety and diversity in foods."

By locating in the economically distressed southside of Evansville, the hope is to see more initiatives take place in the area. "We believe the best impact is bringing about sustainable change to the neighborhood," Korach says. "We acquired a classic 1919 commercial building that had been vacant for years — it's the first economic development project in decades on this side of town."

CenterPointEnergy and Republic Services provided initial seed money for the project and additional financial supporters include Old National Bank, Fifth Third Bank, Vanderburgh

Community Foundation Alliance, Welborn Baptist Foundation and the Chapman Family Foundation. Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority (IHCD) and Patronicity matched \$50,000 in crowdfunded campaign funds for a facade mural and greenspace upgrades, and the city of Evansville allocated \$170,000.

Recognizing that underrepresented entrepreneurs often lack the capital, credit, or collateral for traditional loans, Wilson and Korach created the 501(c)(3) Impact Evansville, Inc., which funded the purchase and rehab of the building and the installation of commercial equipment. "Not everyone is fortunate enough to take out a loan to start a restaurant, and if they can, they're in a lot of debt," Korach says. "We're giving food entrepreneurs an opportunity to save money as they make money to ultimately graduate out of the space and into their own brick and mortar."

DEANDRE WILSON & MERRICK KORACH

01	EVANSVILLE	City
02	2023	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	BEDFORDCOLLAB.COM	Web

\$50K
RAISED IN LESS THAN 60 DAYS

IBU'S
20 IN THEIR TWENTIES
2021 RECEIPIENT

“WHEN I ASKED A NURSE HOW IT'S DIAGNOSED...I TOLD MAKAYLA, 'THERE HAS TO BE A BETTER WAY.'”



CLEAN LINE DIAGNOSTICS

MAKAYLA PHILLIPS & NATHAN DIERCKMAN

01	CARMEL	City
02	2023	Founded
03	2	Number of employees
04	N/A	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Polina Osherov

MAKAYLA PHILLIPS AND NATHAN DIERCKMAN KNOW PATIENTS DESERVE BETTER.

Purdue freshmen Makayla Phillips and Nathan Dierckman were in high school when they decided there had to be a better way to screen for urinary catheter infections. "I was shadowing an emergency room physician at a local hospital and a patient had a urinary path catheter infection," Dierckman says. "When I asked a nurse how it's diagnosed, he said they saw blood in the urine bag and did a diagnostic test. I came home and told Makayla, 'there has to be a better way.'"

Under the guidance and encouragement of Carmel High School science teacher Craig Harper, the two developed an early diagnosis system that connects to a catheter unit for infection identification before symptoms present, allowing for significantly better treatment outcomes. "The reason catheter infections are unable to be diagnosed earlier is most often because patients are getting catheters after surgeries," Phillips says. "They're being pumped full of pain killers and fever suppressants, so symptoms don't present themselves until long after the infection has developed."

Phillips and Dierckman created Clean Line Diagnostics, and through STARTedUP Foundation's Innovate WithIN competition, won a \$1,000 Regional prize. They then took first place at the state competition and received \$25,000 in seed funding along with \$10,000 each in scholarship funds.

At Purdue, Phillips is pursuing biomedical engineering and Dierckman is majoring in nursing. They have filed an LLC, and next on their agenda are to pursue a patent, and to work with other developers to further design the product. The experience in the competition has allowed them to meet many successful business people, who they have found are not much different from themselves. says Dierckman: "They're just people who did what they wanted to do, followed their dream, and didn't give up."

\$25K
IN SEED FUNDING



EVEREWEAR

“WE CANNOT GET TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY WITHOUT FIXING THE DISCOVERABILITY ASPECT OF SECOND-HAND.”

ANNA DORRIS

01	INDIANAPOLIS	City
02	2023	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	EVEREWEAR.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

ANNA DORRIS IS STIMULATING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY.

While majoring in finance at the IU Kelley School of Business in Indianapolis, Anna Dorris had the idea to create a new experience to make it easier for consumers to shop second-hand apparel. "The process of finding the perfect second-hand clothing is overwhelming," she says. "But people seek out second-hand clothes because it's the most affordable and sustainable way to shop for fashion." With an artificial intelligence machine learning platform, her Indianapolis company Everewear aims to make it easier for consumers to shop for used clothing than it is to shop new.

Acting as an intermediary between consumers and second-hand stores, the Everewear website solves the second-hand challenge by inviting users to complete a style profile which collects over sixty data points on everything from style preferences to clothing size and budget; the system's accuracy increases the more a user shops.

Targeted to launch in May 2024, Everewear already has a wait-list of approximately 1,000 clients, with a major leader in the industry lined up as the first resale vendor.

After netting \$2,500 from the IUPUI JagStart pitch competition in 2021, Dorris next competed at Nexus through Elevate Ventures and was awarded \$20,000 in pre-seed money. Since then, she has raised over \$55,000 in additional pre-seed money in anticipation of the launch and anticipates \$500,000 in pre-seed funding. She also participated in NEXT Studio's Discovery Week and the Energy and Sustainability cohort through gBETA Indiana.

Dorris' future goals for her business are to grow her client base to 100,000 within about three years, onboard more resale vendors, and expand internationally. "The main mission of this venture is to stimulate the circular economy and we cannot get to a circular economy without fixing the discoverability aspect of second-hand and making it easier to shop second-hand," she says. "That's really my driving force and why I'm so obsessed with the business."

1K
CLIENT WAITLIST



“ WE IDENTIFIED THE GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE HARDTECH SPACE AND FOCUSED ON CONNECTEDNESS.”

140+ ENTREPRENEURS, STUDENTS, AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS

THE HOOSIER STATE HAS THE INGREDIENTS FOR HARDTECH SUCCESS

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH
 PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs*

“THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS ARE HERE. WE HAVE THE RECIPE. WHY WOULDN'T WE JUST MAKE IT?”

A year into the COVID-19 pandemic, cargo ships circled California ports, waiting to offload manufacturing supplies and household goods. Their holding pattern was a warning sign about the fragility of the U.S. supply chain — and an argument for minimizing risk by creating manufacturing jobs at home in Indiana.

For Mitch Landess and Ryan Henderson of Conexus Indiana — a nonprofit advanced industry initiative of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership — the answer to the problem lay in developing the hardtech industry in the Hoosier state. “Hardtech has been called Industry 4.0 or smart manufacturing,” said Henderson, director of innovative and digital transformation at Conexus. “It includes physical products that have manufacturing and software components.”

In early 2023, HardTech Indiana was formed as a coalition of eight public and private entities providing thought leadership and program development to create the ecosystem necessary for hardtech companies to thrive in Indiana.

“We identified the gaps and opportunities in the hardtech space and really focused on connectedness,” Henderson said. “Hardtech entrepreneurs were not connected to one another or the resources they need to grow or find talent.”

Connectedness is particularly important for hardtech entrepreneurs, who face higher costs to launch their ideas and require expertise from multiple sectors to get a product into production. “It’s not software engineering alone, it’s electrical and industrial engineering, manufacturing,” said Mark Gramelspacher, executive director of the Smart Manufacturing Fund and entrepreneur in residence at Elevate Ventures. “These companies need deep expertise and mentorship on their teams.”

In its first year, HardTech Indiana has met twice a month as a group, hosting peer-to-peer learning events that highlight full-fledged hardtech companies at scale. One of the first events was a site tour of ADDMAN Engineering, a 3D printing company in Westfield, Indiana.

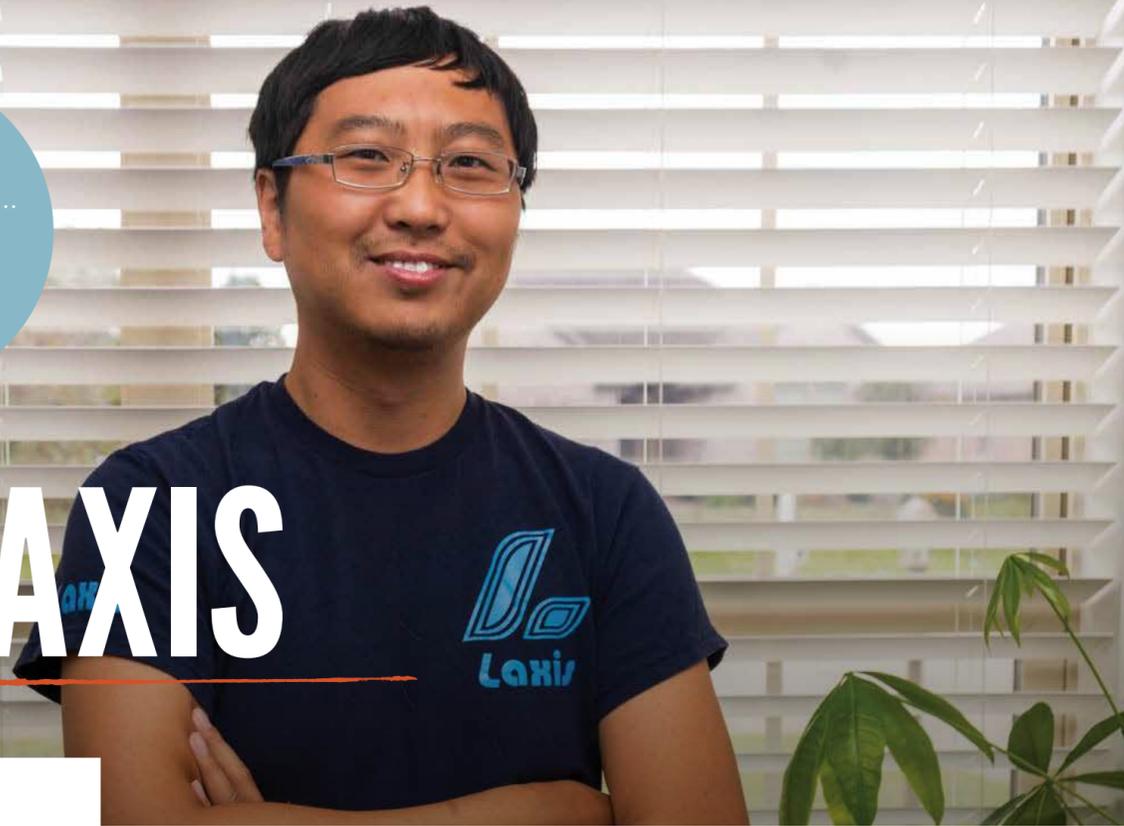
In March 2023, HardTech hosted its kickoff event at 16 Tech, a 50-acre innovation district in downtown Indianapolis. Over 140 entrepreneurs, students and industry partners gathered to exchange ideas, network, and experience the growing energy around hardtech. “Indiana is one of the best manufacturing states in the country,” said Nida Ansari, CEO of Karmic Ventures. “We’re the second largest state in terms of automotive production. Physical goods flow through our distribution centers. And 75% of the country’s population is within a 2-hour flight or 6-hour drive of Indianapolis. All these things flow into hardtech.”

Connecting entrepreneurs to one another and to the vibrant ecosystem of resources that exist in the Hoosier state drives HardTech Indiana to imagine a future where anything is possible. “The right ingredients are here,” Nida says. “We have the recipe. Why wouldn’t we just make it?”

“

WE WANT TO HELP PEOPLE FOCUS ON... BUILDING GREAT RELATIONSHIPS, RATHER THAN TAKING NOTES.”

LAXIS



ERIC XIAO

01	EVANSVILLE	City
02	2020	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	LAXIS.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

ERIC XIAO IS IMPROVING WORKFLOW.

Eric Xiao is making a name for himself in the artificial intelligence sector in Indiana. The Silicon Valley transplant, now based in Evansville, developed Laxis, an AI meeting assistant that generates real-time meeting transcripts and insights to help make meetings less burdensome and more meaty.

Before starting Laxis in 2020, Xiao worked in Silicon Valley's venture capital industry investing in early-stage tech startups. Ironically, he realized a significant amount of his time was spent taking notes in meetings. He pondered a solution that would allow him to derive more value from each meeting and save time and energy. The answer was Laxis.

“Our goal is to provide an AI meeting assistant for every working professional that allows them to engage and enjoy meetings again,” says Xiao. “We want to help people focus on having meaningful conversations and building great relationships, rather than taking notes.”

Laxis is now a fully functioning product that integrates seamlessly with video-conferencing applications such as Google Meet, Zoom, Webex, and Microsoft Teams. Features include LaxisChat that answers questions in real-time

based on previous conversations, Laxis AI Writer to develop agendas, follow-up emails, meeting summaries, customer requirements, action items, and project updates in seconds, and post-meeting audio uploads. Among Laxis' 20,000 end users nationwide are sales and customer success professionals, journalists, and podcasters.

Based on his experience, Xiao is bullish on the ample opportunities for tech founders to base their businesses in Indiana. When launching Laxis, he was able to raise funds for the company by connecting with Elevate Ventures, an Indianapolis-based venture capital fund investing in high-potential cross-sector startups.

Xiao is also a big fan of the low cost of operating a business in Indiana and the many available financial incentives. Up next, he wants to help encourage more local investors and universities to invest in more Indiana-based startups.

DR. NITHYA KASIREDDY IS IMPROVING BLOOD COAGULATION TESTING.

LEVISIONICS



“

IF YOU HAVE THE WILL AND THE RESOURCES, IT WILL HAPPEN.”

DR. NITHYA KASIREDDY

01	FISHERS	City
02	2016	Founded
03	3	Number of employees
04	LEVISIONICS.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Esther Boston

Dr. Nithya Kasireddy was always interested in entrepreneurship, and envisioned becoming a CEO at some point after completing her Ph.D. in biomedical engineering at Tulane University. After more than seven years of lab work on an innovative way to analyze blood coagulation — based on an idea conceived in 2013 by her Tulane advisor Dr. Damir Khismatullin, and Dr. Glynn Holt of Boston University — Kasireddy's CEO opportunity presented itself sooner than expected.

“We'd worked on this project for a while, and Dr. Khismatullin realized it might have commercial applications,” she explains. Levisonics was born, and Dr. Khismatullin invited Dr. Kasireddy to lead the company in 2016. “What we're trying to do is make blood coagulation testing easier, safer and more accessible by minimizing the amount of sample needed.”

Levisonics' flagship medical device quickly measures a patient's coagulation status using acoustic levitation technology. For the patient, that means a simple finger stick instead of traditional blood draws to determine potentially dangerous bleeding or clotting risks.

“It's a huge advantage to do a coagulation test with substantially less sample volume,” says Dr. Kasireddy. “Newborn babies, for example, can't afford to lose a large amount of blood for testing. It's also a better option for people who find blood draws scary.”

Reaching out to hospitals and interviewing clinicians for input has helped identify unmet needs and inform product development. It also helped establish valuable connections with prospective customers to be leveraged once the device is ready for distribution.

Since relocating from New Orleans to Fishers, Dr. Kasireddy has found resources like the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, Small Business Innovation Research grant funding, Indiana IoT Lab, and the Indiana Biosciences Research Institute's Mentoring Program to be valuable supports.

“When I moved here, I didn't know anyone and was working from home,” she recalls. “I happened to drive by the Indiana IoT Lab incubator space, and it was exactly what I needed at the right time.”

Although still in collaboration with colleagues at Tulane, Dr. Kasireddy is striving to build a name for Levisonics on its own merits.

“Being an entrepreneur is not your average day job,” she says. “There's a lot of risk associated. You have to just believe in what you're doing enough to outweigh it.”

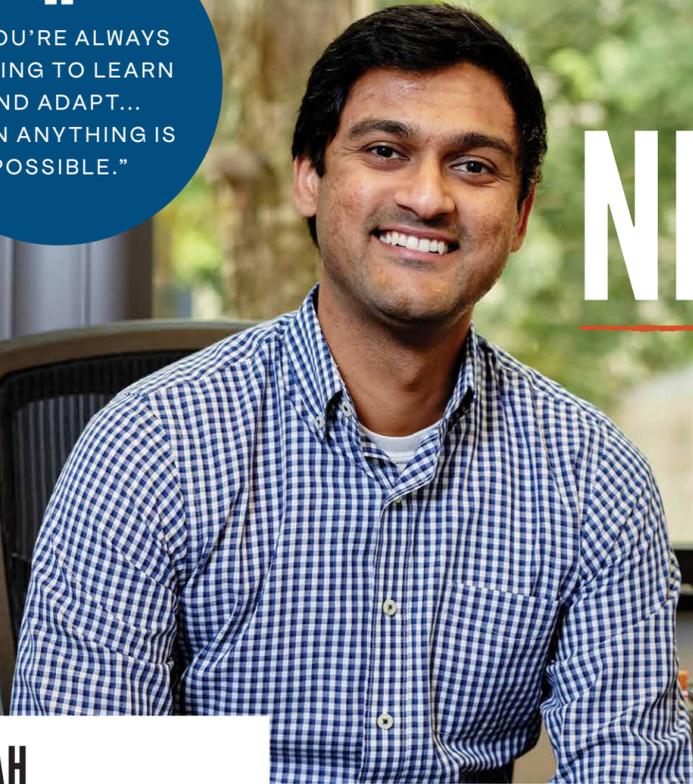
60X

LESS BLOOD NEEDED FOR TESTING THAN COMPETING SOLUTIONS

31M+

WORDS GENERATED BY LAXIS EACH MONTH

“ IF YOU’RE ALWAYS WILLING TO LEARN AND ADAPT... THEN ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.”



NEURAVA

JAY SHAH

01	WEST LAFAYETTE	City
02	2019	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	NEURAVA.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY LAVANYA NARAYANAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

JAY SHAH IS FIGHTING EPILEPSY.

Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy (SUDEP) is a fatal complication of the medical condition that Jay Shah and his business partner Vivek Ganesh hope to control.

“SUDEP is the most common category of death in epilepsy. And there’s nothing these patients could do about it: so much so that we said, ‘why is that, and how can we change that?’” says Shah.

Although he didn’t know it at the time, Shah’s undergraduate internship at the University of Texas at Austin with a company that made implantable devices for electrical stimulation to treat seizures was a harbinger of things to come. While pursuing his Ph.D. in electrical engineering at Purdue University, he met Ganesh and the ball started rolling.

While the exact cause of SUDEP is unknown, possible reasons include long pauses in breathing that can reduce oxygen in the blood, and heart rhythm changes that can become dangerous or lead to cardiac arrest. Shah devised Neurava, a first-of-its-kind wearable device, one for the arm and one for the neck, that identifies and alerts for seizures and impending SUDEP risk for adults or children.

Shah’s next step for Neurava’s is FDA clearance: making sure the devices meet legal

standards, participating in safety and efficacy training, and completing a plethora of paperwork and clinical validation.

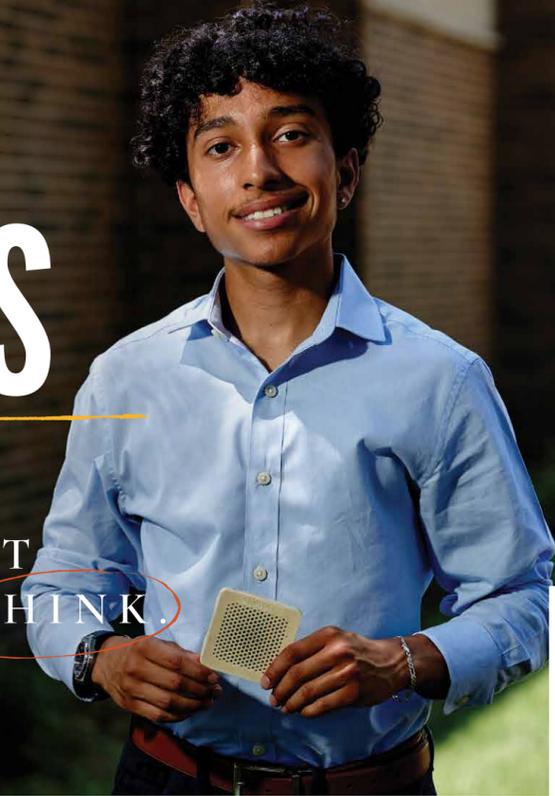
“FDA clearance is very important,” says Shah. “At the end of the day, we want a device that patients and their families will use — that’s been at the forefront of our minds throughout the whole development process.”

Speaking to physicians and patients has been key in creating the noninvasive device and bringing it to market, which Shah hopes will happen by 2025. His journey has also included networking with other business owners, who have provided advice about filing patents and creating a market niche. Furthermore, Shah gained fundamental knowledge about building a company from scratch through his participation in the Purdue Innovates Startup Foundry.

“We’ve seen the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, just as any startup would,” says Shah. “The one thing I would tell anyone in my shoes? It’s all about persevering and pushing through — if you’re always willing to learn and adapt your mindset to the current business ecosystem, then anything is possible.”

\$650K
RAISED IN VENTURE CAPITAL

“ IF YOU HAVE AN IDEA AND THE PASSION, YOU CAN PUT SOMETHING NEW OUT INTO THE WORLD.”



NOVOS

WE CREATE SCENTS THAT MAKE YOU THINK.

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

Recent Munster High School graduates Joshua Avila and Sayeed Mohammed are banking on scent as the secret to success. Together with classmate Austin Beetson, the trio conceptualized and incorporated Novos, their culture-inspired fragrance and air freshener company, as a class project three years ago.

“I’m from India and when I moved here, it was hard to find the scents that connected me to my home,” Mohammed says. Among the five senses, smell is the most connected to memory in our brains — and is often culturally-specific.

Meaning “new” in Greek, Novos produces candles and magnetized metal squares with changeable air filters that emit scents evocative of a specific global location or culture. Novos targets its two main audiences — international travelers and immigrants who are missing the distinctive aromas of their homelands — through ads on apps and social media platforms. Mohammed and Avila (of Mexican and African-American heritage) are quick to call out business teacher Kristin LaFlech as their biggest champion.

“We took a business incubator class at our school the first year it was offered,” Avila notes. “We were her first students, and it was her first time teaching the curriculum.” Said their teacher LaFlech: “To see them now, out in the community, being leaders? That’s huge.”

After several years in research and development, Novos won third place in the STARTedUP Foundation’s 2023 Innovate Within competition, along with \$2,500 in seed money and a trip to Washington D.C. to make connections with entrepreneurial mentors and government officials.

“Purdue University Northwest has also put us in touch with engineers, and another startup company in Indiana called DeoBlock [maker of a deodorizer product] has been really helpful,” Mohammed adds.

Avila and Mohammed hope to blaze new trails for entrepreneurship among people of color.

“We want to inspire others to put their ideas out there and start their own businesses,” Avila says. “We wouldn’t have made it this far without the support and guidance we’ve received.”

“Everyone has their own background and culture; that’s what makes them unique,” Mohammed adds. “We want to embrace that diversity and celebrate those differences.”

SAYEED MOHAMMED AUSTIN BEETSON JOSHUA AVILA

01	MUNSTER	City
02	2023	Founded
03	3	Number of employees
04	N/A	Web

#3
AT 2023 INNOVATE WITHIN COMPETITION



NOVAPARKE

WRITTEN BY LAURA MCPHEE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

“ WE HAVE A HIGHLY EDUCATED WORKFORCE IN FLOYD COUNTY, AND WE DON'T WANT TO LOSE THEM.”

Among the bucolic, rolling hills of Floyd County, Indiana lie 150 acres of historic farmland local officials are hoping will become the future home base of some of the country's most innovative minds in tech, life-sciences, engineering, and mathematics.

When the Novaparke Innovation and Technology Campus in Edwardsville cut the ribbon for the first of its open facilities in July 2023, it was an event more than 15 years in the making.

As traditional industries and jobs in agriculture and manufacturing have disappeared, Floyd County has imagined ways to replace those jobs by forging meaningful economic development strategies that will help create a better quality of life for all of its citizens.

Floyd County officials began by repurposing land owned by the county to develop a new environment for research and development divisions, aerospace companies, advanced tech firms, software development companies, biomedical and laboratory facilities, and agricultural research. In short, they set out to attract organizations that aspire to be pioneers of technology and development.

Don Lopp, director of operations and planning for the Floyd County Board of Commissioners, has been involved from the beginning and understands the project's challenges — and its necessity.

“FLOYD COUNTY IS SMALL AND DOESN'T HAVE SOME OF THE LOGISTICAL AND ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES OUR NEIGHBORING COUNTIES DO. AND SO WE HAD TO BE MORE CREATIVE AND LOOK AT WHAT OUR STRENGTHS WERE.”

County officials took advantage of Indiana's READI fund (Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative), meant to jumpstart strategic investments in making Indiana a magnet for talent and economic growth. To launch, the Novaparke project leveraged more than \$4 million in READI grants.

The July 2023 grand opening also served as an occasion to announce Novaparke's anchor tenant, Redwire. A tech leader in space infrastructure, Redwire is focused on solar power generation and in-space 3D printing and manufacturing. Their new 30,000-square foot facility will support increased demand from commercial companies and academic researchers focused on improving pharmaceutical drug development, optimizing disease treatments, and enabling technologies essential for modern spaceflight.

“This company is working on 3D printing of human tissue in space,” says Lopp. “They are truly on the cutting edge of technology, and they've chosen Novaparke as their headquarters.”

Lopp believes other companies in these innovative industries will soon follow suit. “We have a highly educated workforce in Floyd County, and we don't want to lose them. We don't want local entrepreneurs leaving Indiana to go to work for national and international companies when there could be opportunities for them right here.”

In an effort to prevent potential brain drain, the county has already forged a strategic partnership with IU Southeast, calling for students and faculty from the School of Business and School of Natural Sciences to provide consultation and instruction on business plan development, pitch competitions, and laboratory operations for entrepreneurs and fledgling tech companies. New Albany based coworking space, The Root, has opened a second location on the Novaparke campus to offer collaborative space and on-demand access to the Southeast Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) advisors.

It's all part of the county's vision to offer an incubation center with quality support services and a collaborative work environment for tech entrepreneurs and startups in a uniquely pastoral setting.

“Floyd County is looking towards the future, and we want to attract people who are doing the same,” says Lopp. “The economic development and well-being of our community depends on it.”

LEVERAGED
\$4M+
IN READI GRANTS



IT'S NO SECRET THAT EMBEDDED IN THE HISTORY OF GARY, IS THE STORY OF THE GREAT MIGRATION, STEEL MILL WORKER GENERATIONS, AND THE AFTERMATH OF DEINDUSTRIALIZATION.

To some, the economic power of the rust belt city is a distant memory, but to Faith Spencer and Emmani Ellis, the legacy of Gary's ingenuity and work ethic is alive and well. That is why they began IronWorkz, a startup nonprofit that seeks to provide a coworking and entrepreneurship incubation space for minority students and Gary citizens to gain real world entrepreneurial experience.

Though Faith and Emmani are fresh graduates of Purdue University, both founders have strong entrepreneurial spirits and experience matched with an unwavering commitment to building a better Gary. Having developed businesses in high school, they both learned the value of solving other people's problems using innovative methods. Now as President/CEO and Chief Operating Officer respectively, Faith and Emmani have used their time at Purdue to take advantage of every entrepreneurial resource available to them.



Both founders have pursued concentrations in entrepreneurship and innovation at Purdue which allowed them to access the full breadth of resources on campus. Once they had access, they realized that what was missing was a hub for students to gain practical experience building and running their own businesses. This led to the development of IronWorkz.

As they continue to develop, they have enlisted the Indiana Small Business Center (SBDC) to provide business development support as they build the administrative and programmatic elements of their business. The SBDC has been helpful with grant writing, budgeting, and branding.

A major milestone for IronWorkz has been their programming. During the summer of 2023, they hosted a series of events for the Gary community that welcomed hundreds of people interested in their mission. The team organized six entrepreneurship workshops for 290 entrepreneurs and hosted a back-to-school bash that supplied 105 families with \$25 uniform vouchers and back-to-school resources. At just eight months old, IronWorkz has served hundreds of community members in the Gary community and the young team is looking forward to serving even more.

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Polina Oshero

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Brandon Wright

RALLY

FOSTERS
CROSS-SECTOR
COLLABORATION



TODAY, YOU MUST COLLABORATE CROSS SECTOR TO WIN IN THE MARKETPLACE.”



Christopher Day, CEO of Elevate Ventures and Rally Visionary, believes that Indiana can be the epicenter of what global economists have referred to as the “Productivity Boom.”

“We have the number one ranked infrastructure and airport in the U.S., and we graduate the second highest number of undergraduate engineers,” Day said. “We are ranked the best place to start a tech company and the number one regulatory environment by Forbes. The world just doesn’t know, so we need to get the message out.”

One of the ways that Day, his colleagues at Elevate Ventures and other leaders across Indiana’s entrepreneurial ecosystem hoped to share that message was by launching Rally, the world’s largest cross-sector innovation conference.

Held in Indianapolis from August 29 – 31, Rally featured over 5,000 attendees, 1,500 meetings between companies and investors, and 220 speakers across content sessions spanning software, healthcare, hardtech, sportstech, agriculture and food, and entrepreneurship. Keynote speakers included Peyton Manning, Magic Johnson and Victoria Arlen. And Rally’s \$5 million cash IN-Prize pitch competition drew 443 applications from entrepreneurs across 38 different countries.

“Historically, most companies have operated in a vacuum,” Day noted. “Today, you must collaborate cross sector to win in the marketplace. Rally was built to help entrepreneurs and VCs meet potential customers and partners, be exposed to future talent, and develop relationships that will lead to growth and innovation.”

Organizing Rally required the exact kind of collaboration between pillars of Indiana’s entrepreneurial ecosystem that Day hopes to foster across sectors. “Rally has very much been a collaborative process,” Day said. “Elevate

imagined the new opportunity and The Indiana Economic Development Corporation was instrumental in underwriting the conference as the pair decided to become founding hosts; AgriNovus, Purdue Innovates, Applied Research Institute, Indiana University and SportsTechHQ are the Platinum Sponsors; and High Alpha and Demand Jump have offered major in-kind contributions of marketing and brand design. Beck’s, Notre Dame, Ship Sigma, Blast Media and many other organizations have all contributed in significant ways.”

“We hope other conferences will consolidate with Rally to add more value for attendees,” Day said. “Gener8tor has an agriculture conference they usually hold in Illinois; they brought it to Indiana, launched it the day before Rally, and the remaining three days of the conference blend into Rally. Indy Women in Tech (IWIT) and the Indiana Technology and Innovation Association (ITIA) did the same with their Annual Summits, hosting them under their own brand name within Rally. We’d like more conferences to do the same in the future to create better outcomes across the board.”

In the end, Day and Elevate are focused on how Rally will impact quality of life for people in Indiana—and beyond. “If we support entrepreneurs, they can have a tremendous impact on their communities. Every new tech job creates 4.3 additional jobs. Those people buy homes and contribute to the economy, but most importantly, they can more easily achieve whatever their definition of success is. There’s so much joy in being a part of that, it’s not even measurable.”



ROGUE.AI

SPENCER MAE-CROFT IS REDEFINING AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES.

“ THE 16TECH ENVIRONMENT HAS OPENED UP SO MANY DOORS FOR US.”



SPENCER MAE-CROFT

01	INDIANAPOLIS	City
02	2022	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	N/A	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Plymouth Native Spencer Mae-Croft grew up working in agriculture and began wondering why there were only manned aircrafts spraying farm fields as opposed to drones. After graduating from Indiana University, he began building drones in his apartment. By talking with prospective customers and farmers, what started out as a side project soon grew into a company.

As President & CEO of Rogue.ai, Mae-Croft initially drove across the state and sent out emails in order to understand what the agriculture industry needs in a drone. “What we’re trying to do is bring precision to aerial spraying in farm fields,” he says. “Our precision spraying drone weighs 700 pounds, has 20-foot spray booms and farmers will be able to select the field location to apply chemicals with some simple clicks.”

Through the 2022 Elevate Nexus Pitch competition, Rogue.ai received \$20,000 and has since raised money through an angel investor. “Up until that point, it was trying to figure out how we were going to build this vehicle,” Mae-Croft says. “Now that we’ve raised the money, instead of photos of what we want to build, we can actually show the vehicle.”

The company already has a lead for the next round of funding and wants to grow the team by adding additional engineers. Having already pre-sold two vehicles, they hope to pre-sell twenty-five additional drones and have the first flight occur by the end of 2023. Since moving the company to Indianapolis, Mae-Croft works out of 16Tech which offers not only the machines to build the drones, but also fellow businesses and mentors. “The 16Tech environment has opened up so many doors for us,” he says. “There are several engineering firms here that assist us, and there’s an ecosystem that’s really good at helping hard-tech founders get a prototype out.”

\$400K

WORTH OF PRE-ORDERS

SERENITY SMILE CARE

“ THE ATTENTION TO DETAIL, THE DESIGN, THE COLORS, AND THE DECOR IS MEANT TO MAKE PATIENTS FEEL COMFORTABLE.”



DR. JANEICE WOOTEN-KERR

01	SELLERSBURG	City
02	2022	Founded
03	5	Number of employees
04	SERENITYSMILECARE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY ALLISON TROUTNER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

DR. JANEICE WOOTEN-KERR IS EASING PATIENT ANXIETY.

In her fourteen years as a dentist, Dr. Janeice Wooten-Kerr began noticing a pattern with many of her new adult patients; they held deeply rooted fears about going to the dentist.

“What I found was that a lot of adults had challenging experiences as children. Even though they have dental insurance to cover their care, they don’t go because of fear,” Wooten-Kerr says.

In 2019, Wooten-Kerr had an idea. She wanted to develop a creative way to disarm nervous patients, so they felt comfortable getting the care they needed and deserved. In 2022, she opened Serenity Smile Care, a spa-like dental practice with warm, scented towels, Netflix, and caring dental professionals.

To help her start her practice, Wooten-Kerr secured a loan from Wells Fargo, which also offers programs specifically for start-up dental practices. They helped connect Wooten-Kerr to realtors, accountants, attorneys, and even a company that provided a demographic analysis to find a location with a need she could fulfill.

At Serenity Smile Care, Wooten-Kerr brings more than a dental service to her patients. She creates a pleasurable patient experience. “I have essential oils in the waiting room, so when you come in the lobby, it smells really good,” she says. “That’s part of the experience; the attention to detail, the design, the colors, and the decor is meant to make patients feel comfortable.”

Patient education and communication is also an important part of the experience. “I tell patients, this is your care; you have to know what I’m doing. If you have a question, ask me because we’re doing this together,” she says. “I found a lot of patients appreciate that.”

For the last several months, the practice has been open part-time. Soon, she plans to open full-time and help more patients across southern Indiana, where it’s not uncommon for a patient to visit after a ten-year dental-care hiatus. Wooten-Kerr doesn’t shame or judge those patients. Instead, her response is always, “Welcome back.”

15+

YEARS OF DENTISTRY EXPERIENCE

ANDREW KNIES and
BARRY DUNLOP ARE

THE BROKEN TEE & EMERALD GREENS

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka



25 & 50
HOUR PACKAGES

IT'S GOOD TO STAY OPEN TO NEW IDEAS.

Andrew Knies is throwing a tee party in Jasper, and everyone's invited. The entrepreneur and avid golfer officially incorporated The Broken Tee in early 2023, opening its doors to the public in July.

"Golf has gotten extremely popular," Knies describes. "It's not just a country-club sport anymore. Everybody's getting into the game." Especially in a virtual sense.

Noting a lack of outdoor courses in Dubois County, Knies invested in two Full Swing sports simulators, hoping that his new indoor recreation facility will become a family-friendly destination for the local community.

"People can come in and learn how to play golf before they ever even set foot on an outdoor course!" he laughs. "If you're not a golfer, the simulators also offer Home Run Derby, Soccer Showdown, Zombie Dodgeball and other sports."

Having created several LLCs, Knies is no stranger to launching new businesses. However, the process of prepping the historic Vine Street building owned by civic leader Todd Fromme to install his privately funded golf venture presented learning curves he'd never encountered before.

"This project required a lot of build-out and reaching out to various city officials for guidance," he explains. "Talking with board members from the Dubois County Community Foundation, Heart of Jasper and other organizations has been helpful and encouraging. The process has been taxing, but seeing the plan go from paper to reality is extremely gratifying."

Joining forces with Emerald Greens Cafe next door was a mutually beneficial no-brainer. Knies has already received lots of positive feedback from corporate groups he's hosted so far, something he plans to continue doing in addition to offering open-to-the-public hours as availability allows.

Once he gets The Broken Tee up and running, Knies wants to bring in new offerings to keep the customer experience fresh.

"Maybe a flight simulator or an auto racing simulator," he ponders. "I'd also love to add an outdoor feature on the patio. We'll see how things go." Until then, golfers can hone their drives and putts to their heart's content, no matter the weather.

"I WANTED TO GENERATE SOMETHING POSITIVE WITHIN MY COMMUNITY."

—ANDREW KNIES

12
MONTH CALENDAR
VISIBILITY



BROKEN TEE

01	ANDREW KNIES	Name of founder
02	JASPER	Location
03	2023	Founded
04	2	Number of employees



EMERALD GREENS

01	BARRY DUNLOP	Name of founder
02	JASPER	Location
03	2023	Founded
04	2	Number of employees



UNIDA TRANSLATION



I WAS HELPED OUT SO MUCH IN SCHOOL WHEN I CAME TO THE U.S... I FEEL LIKE I'M GIVING BACK.

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

Ivana Sedia was born in Argentina to parents of Italian and Macedonian descent and moved to the U.S. before her first birthday. "I was learning Spanish, Italian, and Macedonian at home, and English at school," Sedia recalls.

She earned her MBA with a concentration in management and worked for the Illinois Secretary of State before leaving the job to focus on being a full-time mom. "My husband had an attorney friend who needed a translation of a Panamanian passport from Spanish to English," Sedia says. "Through word-of-mouth I started to get more translation jobs." Sedia also began teaching Italian and Spanish to adults in Lake County, Indiana.

She launched World of Words, LLC, in 2017 as an umbrella company for all her linguistic endeavors, the bulk of which were in-person language lessons. "When COVID hit, people were afraid to take classes in person," Sedia says. "I tried offering classes online but most of my students were adults who took the class to network and the format wasn't ideal. I thought my business was over."

"Sedia applied for the Indiana Technical Assistance Program (INTAP) offered through the Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which provides up to \$15,000 in professional services to help businesses grow. "I worked with the Northwest SBDC and Silva Devarj of Devarj Design and they helped me realize that I needed to rebrand and pivot," Sedia says.

World of Words became Unida Translation — a name with a clever dual meaning. "'Unida' means 'united' in Spanish, and in English it sounds like 'you need a...,'" Sedia notes. Since the pivot, Unida Translation has grown to offer interpretation and translation services in 125+ languages, with interpreters and translators located all over the world.

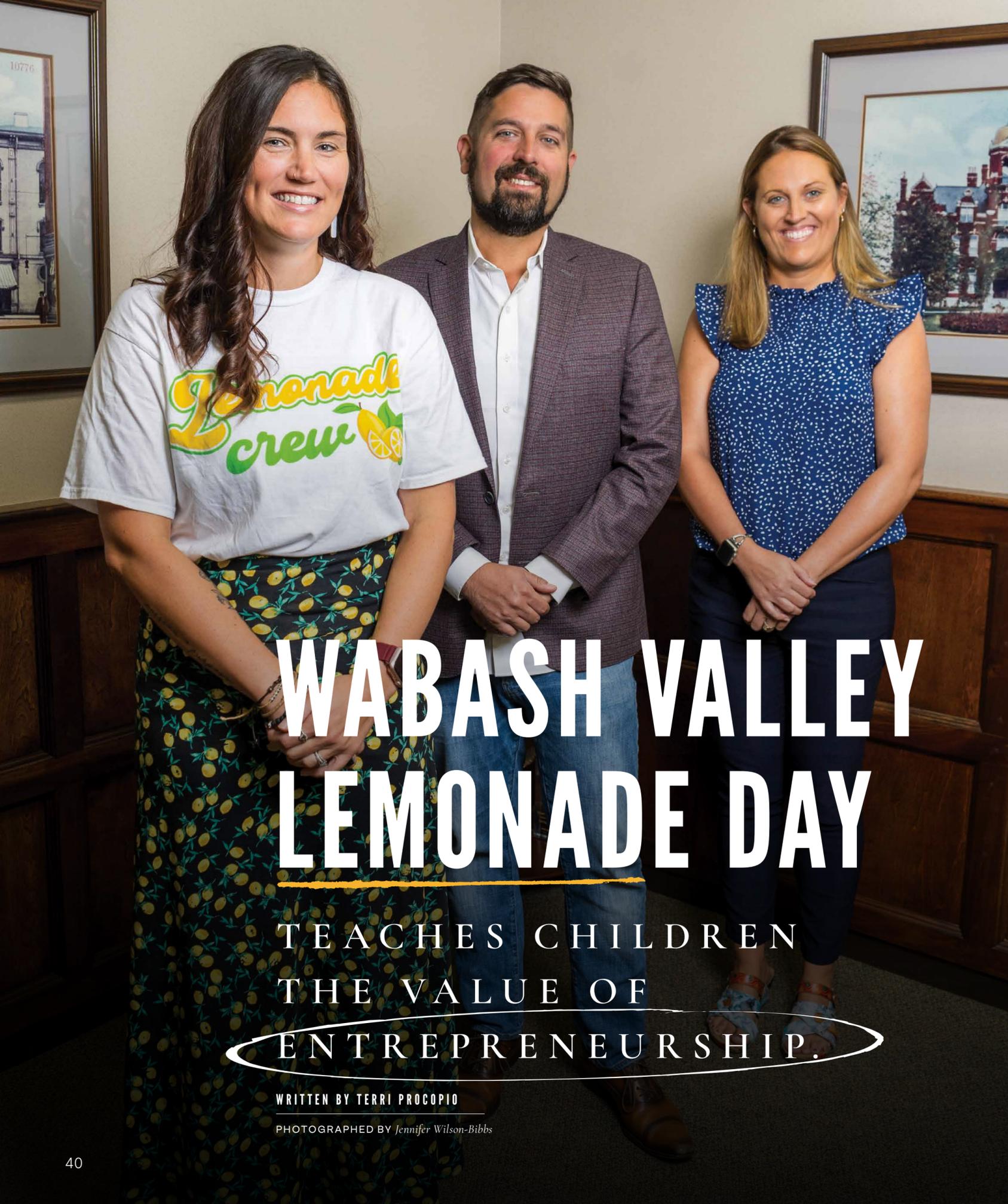
Sedia tries to connect clients with interpreters who share the same origin country. "I speak Spanish, but I really speak castellano because I'm from Argentina," Sedia explains. "There's Spanish from Spain, Mexico, Puerto Rico — they all have nuances." Sedia's company outperforms search engine bots when it comes to exacting, culturally accurate translations.

The most rewarding part of her work is helping immigrants connect to the resources they need — from job training in their native language, to translation of legal documents. "I was helped out so much in school when I came to the U.S.," Sedia says. "In a way, I feel like I'm giving back."



IVANA SEDIA

01	DYER	City
02	2017	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	UNIDATRANSLATION.COM	Web



WABASH VALLEY LEMONADE DAY

TEACHES CHILDREN
THE VALUE OF
ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs



THE SPEND, SHARE, SAVE MODEL IS A BIG PART OF WHAT THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION TEACHES CHILDREN.”

—EMILY FREEMAN

Since coming to Terre Haute in 2012, Lemonade Day has been teaching children about entrepreneurship and financial literacy through running a lemonade stand. In 2015, it became a sponsored program under Chances and Services for Youth (CASYS) and Lemonade Day now encompasses the entire Wabash Valley with around 200 children participating in last year’s program. “The spend, share, save model is a big part of what the national organization teaches children,” says Wabash Valley Lemonade City Director Emily Freeman. “Through CASY, we offered a summer camp where we worked with campers on lessons to help them prepare for Lemonade Day, and then partnered with businesses in downtown Terre Haute who let them set up their stands.”

The Hometown Savings Bank in Terre Haute invited the children for a tour and had them give a presentation about their stands to commercial loan officers, such as how they would be set up and the flavors they would offer. They then learned how the loan application process works when a business is seeking capital. “The children got to see the vault and it was a fun day for them to learn about banking and financial literacy, and understand what they would do with the money once they earn it,” says Summer Long, Commercial Loan Officer at the bank.

The camp kids were able to raise over \$500 for local charities and some of the organizations who received gifts included: United Way of the Wabash Valley, the Terre Haute Humane Shelter, Fuqua Elementary PTO, Dixie Bee Elementary PTO, the Feline Rescue Center, the Wabash Valley Railroad Museum, and the Salvation Army. “It was really fun to let them pick the organization they wanted to donate to and on the last day of camp, we took them around to make the donations in person,” says Freeman. “We thought it would be more impactful for them to hand-deliver the funds they raised so they could see the organization and talk to the people who they were donating to.”

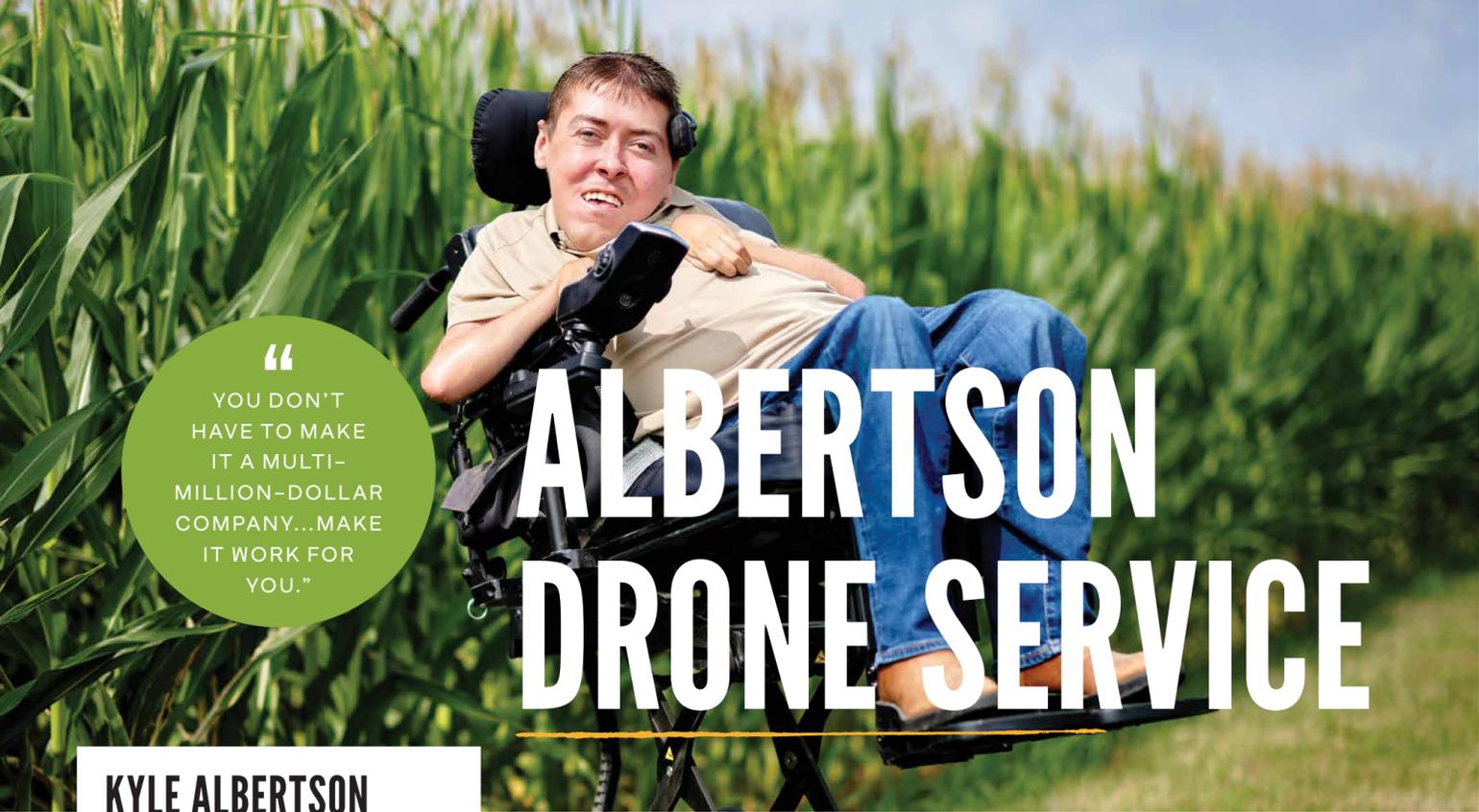
Wabash Valley Lemonade Day next hopes to expand the initiative within the Wabash Valley community by growing participation, establishing more partnerships and expanding its programs even further. “We’ve worked with multiple summer camps where people have asked for financial literacy programming, and now here’s a fun way for kids to do it,” says Freeman. “Next, we want to further increase awareness of the program, get more kids involved and build partnerships with businesses and entities to set the kids up for success.”

LEMONADE DAY PARTICIPANTS WERE ADVISED TO SPEND AND SAVE HALF OF THEIR PROCEEDS, AND WERE ASKED TO DONATE THE OTHER 50% TO A NON-PROFIT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.



MILESTONE 02

EARLY



“ YOU DON’T HAVE TO MAKE IT A MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR COMPANY...MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU.”

ALBERTSON DRONE SERVICE

KYLE ALBERTSON

01 **FOWLER** City

02 **2020** Founded

03 **1** Number of employees

04 **ALBERTSONDRONESERVICE.COM** Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Adam Raschka*

KYLE ALBERTSON IS ADAPTING.

Kyle Albertson grew up in the farming community of Fowler, Indiana, and saw an opportunity to combine agriculture with his interest in drone flying. “I started playing around with drones in high school by taking pictures of houses and of people working in fields,” he says. “Then I got a few real estate clients who had me take photos of listings, and that’s how it all started.”

After listening to a podcast on the future of agriculture produced by Rantizo, a drone crop spraying service, Albertson contacted the company to purchase a drone and soon became an independent contractor for them. This helped him gain name recognition, and in combination with word-of-mouth, he grew his customer base and launched Albertson Drone Service in July 2020. A year later, he completed a degree in agribusiness from Purdue, and the University has continued to support his entrepreneurial journey.

Born with muscular dystrophy, Albertson has used a wheelchair since age three. He was always determined to work in the agricultural industry. “In Benton County, it’s agricultural-based and it’s

what I’ve grown up around,” he says. “I’ve always had to find different ways to do everything that my friends were doing, and drones were kind of my niche.” An adaptive van gives Albertson independence.

Albertson next wants to expand to additional farms and hire a full-time employee. He hopes to have more clients with regular spraying schedules, and is looking at incorporating additional drones and purchasing larger equipment.

He sees the entrepreneurial journey as finding your niche, taking risks, and seeing where a business can go. “You don’t have to make it a multi-million-dollar company,” he says. “As long as you can make it work for you and you are able to get your clients’ needs fulfilled, then I say go for it.”

150%+
INCREASE IN ACRES COVERED YEAR-OVER-YEAR



“ WE BELIEVE WE CAN EMPOWER EVERYONE TO GROW PURE PRODUCE™ IN THE CONVENIENCE OF THEIR OWN HOME.”

ANU™

EMPOWERS PEOPLE TO GROW THEIR OWN PRODUCE AT HOME.

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Brandon Wright*

Recognizing the unsustainable environmental impacts of industrial agriculture, Evansville native Scott Massey set out to combine Indiana’s long-standing appliance engineering and manufacturing legacy with a subscription-based, consumable seed pod model for indoor gardening.

Massey describes his system, trademarked Anu™, as “nespresso for plants, or a “smart garden appliance” with a “distinctly futuristic design.” “It’s about growing food closer to the point of consumption,” he says. “We believe we can empower everyone to grow Pure Produce™ in the convenience of their own home that’s free of preservatives, pesticides, and is alive until the moment it’s consumed for maximum flavor, nutrition, and food safety.”

Launched in 2016, Anu thrived as the COVID-19 pandemic permanently disrupted agriculture — garnering National Science Foundation Small Business Innovation Research Phase I and Phase II grants to develop A.I. computer vision algorithms to enhance its productivity and ease of use. Massey hopes the collective yields of Anu customers’ pods could someday exceed the output of the largest farms in the world.

While a Purdue University student, Massey and his cofounder Ivan Ball worked under Dr. Cary Mitchell, a recipient of NASA and other federal funding, to find the most energy-efficient LED hydroponic grow system. “That engineering exposure opened my mind to the possibilities this technology is capable of,” Massey says.

He also credits Purdue’s pitch competitions and entrepreneurship incubator as critical to the development of the company. “As an engineer, my background is more technical,” he says. “The entrepreneurship program and competitions forced me to step outside my comfort zone and I’m incredibly thankful to Purdue for making those resources available.”

In summer 2023, Anu was awarded an IEDC Manufacturing Readiness Grant which will assist in mass manufacturing its consumable seed pods. “We have no shortage of resources needed to develop our prototype into a fully-fledged product that’s market-ready,” he says. “Combine that with Indiana’s economic policies far out competing neighboring states, and I find it very favorable to be based here.”

SCOTT MASSEY

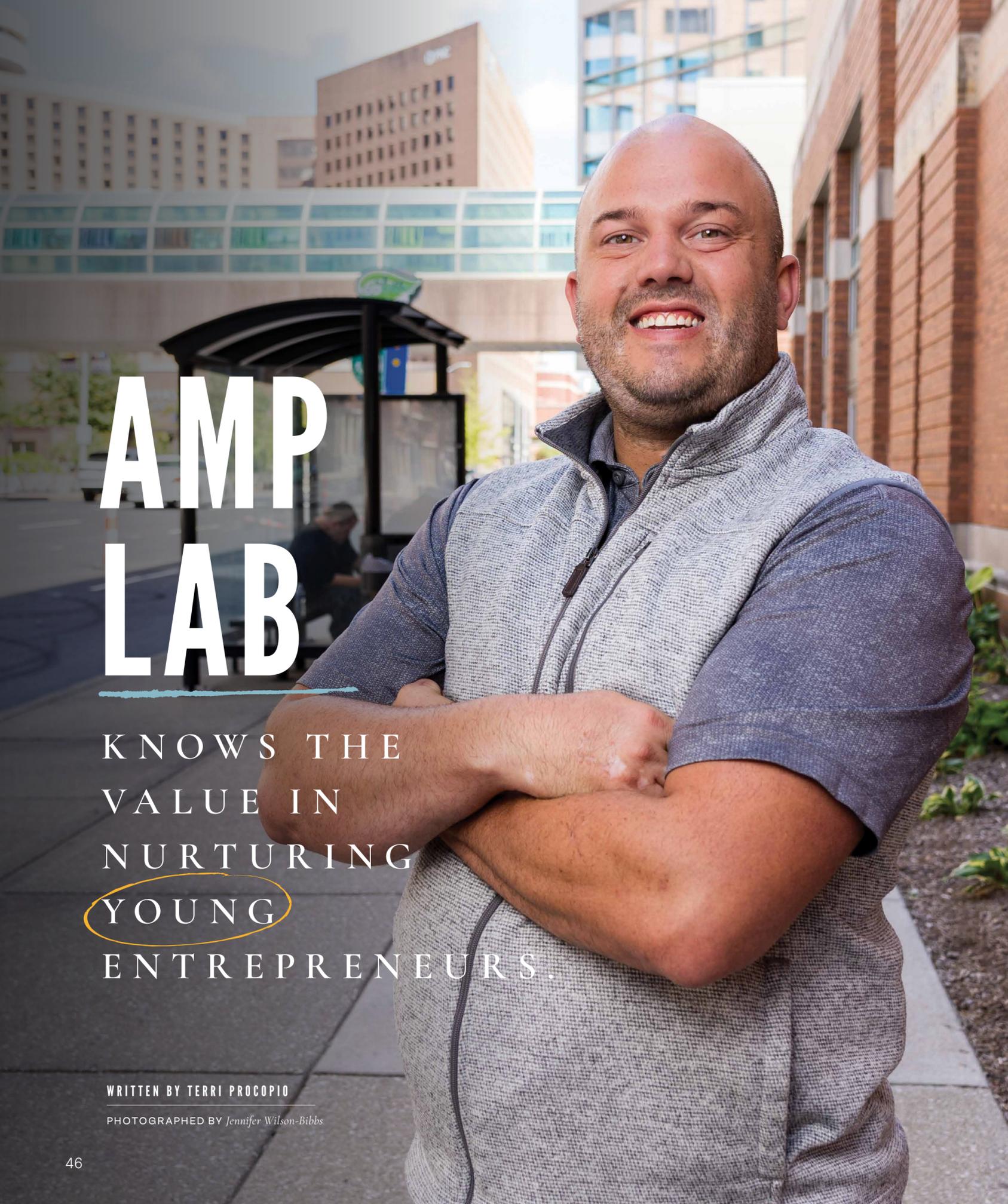
01 **EVANSVILLE** City

02 **2016** Founded

03 **10** Number of employees

04 **GROWANU.COM** Web

2023
IEDC
MANUFACTURING
READINESS GRANT
RECIPIENT



AMP LAB

KNOWS THE
VALUE IN
NURTURING
YOUNG
ENTREPRENEURS.

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs



OUR ASPIRATION IS TO GIVE 16-18-YEAR-OLDS A SEAT THE TABLE WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY.”

What if high school were a cycle of learning, immediately followed by real-time applied learning? By embodying this very approach, Amp Lab at Electric Works in Fort Wayne, Indiana is creating innovative mindsets among high school juniors and seniors, partnering them with local businesses and organizations to solve problems, and offering a taste of the excitement of enterprise.

“Our aspiration is to give 16-to-18-year-olds a seat at the table within our community,” says Amp Lab Director Riley Johnson. “We believe that developing that entrepreneurial spirit in them really changes the role they play in being activators. We create opportunities for them to chase their dreams.”

A program of Fort Wayne Community Schools (FWCS), Amp Lab is located inside the newly renovated General Electric factory complex, a site of business innovation in the state since 1883. With four distinct studios for ideation, design/build, content creation, and science research, Amp Lab is open to students at all five FWCS high schools, via application.

In its inaugural year, Amp Lab engaged approximately 350 students who launched roughly 100 ventures in collaboration with 75 businesses. “Pushing the definition of what it means to be an entrepreneur has been something that we’ve found really resonated with our students,” Johnson says.

“WE’VE STARTED BUILDING OFF-RAMPS AND ARE CREATING SOME VERY CLEAR TRANSITIONAL PATHS, SO AFTER A STUDENT GRADUATES HIGH SCHOOL, THERE’S A WAY FOR THEM TO SPREAD THEIR WINGS.”

Amp Lab has formed regional partnerships with Greater Fort Wayne Inc., Northeastern Indiana Innovation Collective, Start Fort Wayne co-working space, SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), and SEED Fort Wayne, along with Elevate Ventures STARTedUp Foundation, the Department of Education, and Indiana Economic Development Corporation. Amp Lab also receives support from 3Rivers Federal Credit Union, Parkview Mirro Center for Research and Innovations, and Surack Family Foundation.

“Northeast Indiana really embraced us,” Johnson says. “I believed the potential that Amp Lab had was something the community would really be willing to engage with and they’ve blown us away with the support that they’ve given Amp Lab, whether it be providing experiences like internships, providing resources, or coaching and mentoring students.”



“

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE, THE CONNECTIONS, AND THE WAY YOU NETWORK.”

BOADY'S LEMON SHAKE-UPS



CARSON BOADY

01	BEDFORD	City
02	2020	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	N/A	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Polina Osheroov

CARSON BOADY IS QUENCHING THIRST.

The lemonade stand has always symbolized the gumption required for entrepreneurship. Carson Boady takes lemonade entrepreneurship literally.

The 17-year-old Bedford North Lawrence (BNL) senior began his entrepreneurial journey selling baked goods at a local farmers' market. "I wanted to make cookies, but over the course of four Saturdays spent \$500 and hadn't really sold much," Boady says "My dad asked, 'why don't you sell lemonade?'" Taking the question to heart, Boady launched Boady's Lemon Shake-Ups in 2020.

Using his grandmother's strawberry recipe along with his own modifications, he created a second shakeup flavor that became pivotal in growing the business. Made only from fresh ingredients and no artificial syrups, the business grossed around \$30,000 in 2022 and is on track to reach an impressive \$50,000 in 2023.

Not one to dawdle, Boady also manages the football, basketball and baseball teams. The school's athletic director, Jeff Callahan, was instrumental in helping Boady sell shakeups at school sporting events. He credits accounting teacher Karen Day for helping him create a reporting system. And he looked to basketball

coach and business teacher Jeff Hein as a mentor. "Mr. Hein is a really ambitious guy," he says. "He taught me how to be ambitious myself and shoot for the stars."

Boady's arrangement with BNL means he gives 25% of his athletic event profits to the BNL Band Boosters. That led to other opportunities to give back while building his brand. During BNL Homecoming, he sponsored a kickball team, the Boady Shakers.

Boady recently purchased a cargo trailer that will be operating by the end of 2023, to facilitate selling shakeups at events. In the future, he hopes to open a downtown Bedford storefront location to combine all business operations into a single space. Boady sees his entrepreneurial success stemming from both brand recognition and the people that he knows.

"In business, people like to talk about numbers and they're great," he says. "But it's all about the people, the connections, and the way you network. That's the best business technique and the best business plan you can ever have."

BUN'S SOAPBOX



“

I WANT TO GROW THE COMMUNITY FOR THOSE FACES THAT I'VE MET WHO HAVE MADE AN IMPACT ON ME.”

JAMIE FANKHAUSER

01	VALPARAISO	City
02	2018	Founded
03	11	Number of employees
04	BUNSSOAPBOX.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

JAMIE FANKHAUSER IS BRINGING TRADITIONAL SOAP MAKING BACK.

Valparaiso native Jamie Fankhauser began her career in nursing, but always knew she was meant to make soap. When her daughter was diagnosed with Hashimoto's disease, Fankhauser started making homemade goats' milk soap in order to help her skin. "I started passing out bars of soap and a shop owner in Valpo heard about me," she says. "It's hard to find someone who makes soap the old-fashioned, cold-pressed way, so she reached out and wanted to display my products."

Originally working out of her kitchen, in 2018 Fankhauser opened her first storefront in downtown Valpo. BUN's Soapbox products can also be found on Etsy, in local natural grocery stores, and under private labels.

Out of the eleven current BUN's Soapbox employees, eight of them have autism. Fankhauser is passionate about employing autistic adults, and because of this mission, the business caught the attention of major retailer, Meijer. "Having a family member with autism, I thought it was important for them to be employed," she says. "Once the community found out, people started asking if I would hire

their son or daughter."

While Fankhauser uses a local farmer for her goats' milk, she grew up on a farm and hopes to eventually repurchase the 40-acres of land her grandparents once owned to raise her own goats. She is opening a location in a local Meijer this year, with the eventual goal of having all 255 national stores carry her products. By growing and expanding the company even further, her ultimate objective is to employ more autistic adults. "I'm content" she says. "But I want to continue to grow the community for those faces that I've met who have already made such an impact on me."

\$75K
RAISED

OPENING IN A LOCAL MEIJER THIS YEAR

“ I LOVE COOKING FOR OTHER PEOPLE AND HAVING THEM EXPERIENCE THE KIND OF FOOD I’VE LOVED SINCE I WAS A CHILD.”



COLOMBIAN DELIGHTS

JULIANA RESTREPO

- 01 FORT WAYNE City
- 02 2022 Founded
- 03 1 Number of employees
- 04 COLOMBIANDELIGHTSCAFE.COM Web

WRITTEN BY LAURA MCPHEE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

JULIANA RESTREPO IS KEEPING TRADITION ALIVE.

Food has always played a central role in the life of Colombian native Juliana Restrepo, and learning to cook at the side of the women in her family left a lasting impact.

After nearly two decades in the U.S., Restrepo has recently devoted her energy, time, and talents to bringing these family recipes to her Fort Wayne friends and neighbors.

Her small food business Colombian Delights is still in its beginning stages and the mother of three continues to work a full-time job elsewhere while also building her venture from the ground up.

The formula is simple, and for now, her menu is limited. Focused on traditional items like empanadas and chorizo, as well as the hugely popular Colombian shaved ice dessert treats, she is building a customer base at pop-up events and farmers markets around Fort Wayne.

“These are the things we grew up eating in Colombia,” she says. “I love cooking for other people and having them experience the kind of food I’ve loved since I was a child.”

Starting a business from scratch has required her to learn a whole new set of skills and acquire a whole new set of contacts. She credits the Women’s Entrepreneurial

Opportunities Center (WECO) in Fort Wayne and its Women’s Business Center with providing invaluable access to mentors and much needed resources like classes in Spanish that have helped her navigate the start-up process.

“It is hard sometimes, particularly as an immigrant it can be even harder. Opportunities are not always the same,” says Restrepo.

“The Women’s Business Center helps me create business plans, helps me work with the health department requirements, and connects me to many resources.”

A finalist for the Indiana Innovation Center’s Mirro Founder Award, Restrepo received a small grant from the WEOC as well as an “angel investor” award. These have helped her in the early stages of turning Colombian delights into a reality.

While her next goal is a food truck, Restrepo has no plans on limiting her vision. “I don’t want to give up on my dream. People know me now as the lady with Colombian food, I want to keep that growing. I want to build my own brand and a family business here in Fort Wayne.”

FINALIST
INDIANA INNOVATION CENTER’S MIRRO FOUNDER AWARD

“ PEOPLE COME TO ME BECAUSE THEY WANT A PERSONALIZED HEALTH PLAN.”



ENTOURAGE FUNCTIONAL MEDICINE

SARAH WEAVER

- 01 FORT WAYNE City
- 02 2021 Founded
- 03 3 Number of employees
- 04 ENTOURAGEFM.COM Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF Sarah Weaver

SARAH WEAVER IS FOCUSING ON HOLISTIC CARE.

Sarah Weaver was working as a certified integrative medicine nurse practitioner in Fort Wayne when her brother became ill and was placed in hospice due to addiction and mental health challenges. “This was the second brother I had lost to addiction issues,” she says. “I really started to think through how mental health should be treated a lot differently.”

In 2021, after her certification through the Institute for Functional Medicine, Weaver left her corporate job to start Entourage Functional Medicine, which focuses on a holistic, root-cause approach to healthcare, beyond the typical goal of symptom suppression.

Using advanced testing to make improvements at the cellular level, she helps those who are struggling with issues such as fatigue, mood changes, and hormones. “Many are very complicated cases,” she says. “In family practice, when you only have ten minutes with a person, you’re not going to do a deeper dive.” By offering a telehealth membership via an app, patients are able to directly communicate with her when they need support.

Through the Northeast Indiana Innovation Collective (NIIC), Weaver participated in the Women’s Entrepreneurial Opportunity Center (WEOC) program in which coach Leslee Hill was instrumental in helping Weaver form a business plan. Her referral network is now growing and she hopes to expand her client base from 40 to 90.

Weaver is next developing an online course to increase access to functional medicine care which will be paired with a book she is currently writing, and she will be hosting a retreat in Mexico for healthcare professionals in 2024. She plans to offer courses to nurses who want to practice in a holistic way and who may also want to launch their own entrepreneurial journey.

“People come to me because they want a holistic, personalized plan for solving their health problems,” she says. “They’re also busy and don’t want to sit in a waiting room, but rather have somebody who is very responsive to their questions and concerns.”

40+
CLIENTS

BLUEPRINT STATS

FLYWHEEL FUND

FROM SELLING
BUBBLE GUM
TO CREATING
ENTREPRENEURIAL
ECOSYSTEMS

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs



“WE’VE TRIED TO CREATE THOSE THINGS THAT I WISH WOULD’VE EXISTED WHEN I STARTED MY ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY.”

Pat East’s entrepreneurial journey started in sixth grade. “The first time we could chew gum in class, I started selling it to my classmates,” East remembered. “I’d buy a bunch of pieces and sell two for a quarter. I was making bank.”

Fifteen years later, in 2004, East launched Hanapin Marketing, one of the first digital ad agencies in the country. As Hanapin grew to 75 employees, East turned to a new project: a Bloomington upstart called The Mill, a co-working facility with ambitions of evolving into an entrepreneurship center.

East became The Mill’s Executive Director and sold Hanapin to Brainlabs, their largest UK competitor. Now he could focus on cultivating new entrepreneurs. “Early on we started building programming that we knew would grow our ecosystem,” East said. “A code school, lunch and learns, a regional partnership with Elevate Ventures, a statewide pitch competition.”

Thanks to funding from the City of Bloomington, The Mill was renovated into the largest co-working space in the state — a 19,000-square-foot home to 350 members. The Mill sought additional funding for its startups, and Flywheel Fund was born.

“There’s tons of capital in Bloomington, but most of it was going into the stock market and real estate,” East said. “Very little was going into startups.”

MY FIRST PITCH TO FLYWHEEL FUND INVESTORS WAS: ‘YOU GET TO INFORM WHAT THE FUTURE OF BLOOMINGTON LOOKS LIKE.’”

Flywheel Fund invests in early-stage, Indiana-based tech companies, with a focus on women and minority-owned businesses. The fund is many investors’ first experience with angel investment, helping grow both the businesses they invest in but a pipeline of Angels as well. Flywheel’s first round of funding in 2020 included 10 investors offering \$100,000.

By 2023, the fund had grown to 60 investors and \$1.1 million, with 63% of Flywheel’s capital awarded to female or minority-owned businesses. “We couldn’t do what we’re doing without government support,” East emphasized. “I did the first fund by the skin of my teeth, but then we received \$400,000 from the Economic Development Administration and Flywheel really started expanding our reach.”

The Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) took notice of Flywheel’s success, awarding funding for East and his team to apply the Flywheel model to offices in Lafayette and South Bend-Elkhart. “The contract we have with IEDC makes it financially viable to invest in another city,” East said.

East understands the value of resources like The Mill and Flywheel Fund for young entrepreneurs. “I took significantly more brusing than I should have as a young entrepreneur,” East recalls. “There wasn’t this infrastructure of programming, pitch competitions, and investors. We’ve tried to create those things that I wished would’ve existed when I started my journey.”



FLOVISION

BUILT FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD.

“

THE BEST WAY TO SEE A SUSTAINABILITY BENEFIT IS TO TIE IT TO THE FINANCIALS OF BUSINESS.”

1M

POUNDS OF FOOD ANALYZED IN 2023

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTO COURTESY OF Rian McDonnell

FloVision Solutions founder Rian McDonnell was completing his dissertation in mechanical engineering at Trinity College in his native Ireland when he first began studying food waste, sustainability, and ways to optimize the food chain. He then landed in the U.S. to continue his education at the University of Notre Dame's ESTEEM program, designed to immerse engineering and science grad students in the hands-on learning of business and entrepreneurship.

Reflecting McDonnell's passion for reducing the food industry's environmental footprint, FloVision is now an international operation that installs food sensors and cameras to assist beef plants in optimizing their trimming procedures. This optimization not only maximizes food resources but also eliminates waste. As a result, it helps the bottom line and the sustainability metric of a lower carbon output.

“Our device has a screen that allows trimmers to see, and therefore optimize, their performance,” McDonnell says. “The interfaces at these plants were very archaic. We iterated ours from something that was similar to something that is now more modern.”

RIAN MCDONNELL

01 SOUTH BEND	City
02 2020	Founded
03 6	Number of employees
04 FLOVISIONSOLUTIONS.COM	Web

The IDEA center at Notre Dame allowed FloVision Solutions the opportunity to test various concepts while developing the company, and the Notre Dame network proved invaluable for helping find investors and creating customer introductions. Participation in the university's McCloskey New Venture Pitch Competition and in an Elevate Ventures' Nexus Pitch Competition in 2020 led to FloVision's first venture capital investor.

The next milestones will be closing the seed round of funding, expanding the team of engineers, and growing the customer base. “We're trying to set up new pilot customers in the states and abroad,” McDonnell says. “In the future we'll be going into pork, and beyond that, we want to expand up and down the entire food chain.”

MEG HOVIOUS IS FIGHTING THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS.

HERE

“

OUR MISSION IS MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE IN THE MOMENT.”

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Cognitive and Organizational Psychologist Meg Hovious is committed to addressing how people think about mental health and making positive changes in this area. Initially launching her business Here shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic began, she helped businesses navigate through the fluctuations and uncertainty during that period. “I started working with teams on self-regulating practices and stress management techniques to help bring calm to the mind during that tumultuous time,” she says.

As a consulting company that acts as facilitators and advisors to workplaces, schools and the community, the business focuses on collective changes necessary to address the mental health crisis and better understand human behavior. “We're usually brought in when an organization recognizes morale and productivity are low and overall engagement is suffering,” Hovious says. “Our mission is meeting people where they are in the moment, and in the here and now.”

After moving back to Indiana from New York City, Hovious joined Indianapolis' Speakeasy where she has made the majority of her professional contacts. She has found the city's ecosystem infinitely easier to launch a company compared to other locations. “The Midwest

hospitality really shines through within the entrepreneur community,” she says. “It lends a huge hand to people who are starting a business, because you need support, networking and connections.”

Hovious wants to continue assisting workplaces and schools on their organizational health and how they are set up to provide help to people, along with addressing the mental health crisis through community building and de-stigmatization. “I think about what it will take to build a society that puts mental health on par with physical health,” she says “It'll take the power of people and a movement to step up and demand access to mental healthcare and help folks understand how to navigate mental health resources.”

MEG HOVIOUS

01 INDIANAPOLIS	City
02 2020	Founded
03 1	Number of employees
04 CHANGEISHERE.CO	Web

2500+

EMPLOYEES IMPACTED ACROSS 9 COUNTRIES

INTERTWINED

“ONCE WE GOT THAT FIRST SALE, EVERYTHING STARTED FALLING INTO PLACE.”

KERRY AO

01	NEWBURGH	City
02	2022	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	INTERTWINEDFINANCE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

KERRY AO IS ADULTING.

Kerry Ao understands exactly how to get information across to Gen Z'ers, because he is one.

"It's hard to teach students in the classroom via textbook or PowerPoint," the recent high school graduate explains. "That's just not how we learn now."

To that end, Ao and his fellow business club leader began hatching plans in late 2021 to build an immersive software platform to teach financial literacy. Call it the gamification of adulting: through interactive, real-world scenarios, users learn about managing a monthly budget, building a credit score, investing in the stock market, and more. Intertwined's AI technology restructures content in response to each unique student's reactions within the platform.

"We like to say Intertwined is by students, for students," he says. "We recognize AI [artificial intelligence] as a tool that can be applied to education, but we realize it's also important to moderate it and maintain a human element."

Ao and his colleagues used the University of Evansville's High School Changemaker Challenge and the STARTedUP Foundation's annual Innovate WithIN competition as a launch pad to pitch their concept and incorporate in

March 2022, raising enough capital to fund a testing platform. A year later, Intertwined secured its first sale, and the company has been gaining traction ever since. "By the end of August [2023], between our financial literacy software and our stock market simulator, we should be looking at a presence in almost 300 high schools," Ao reports.

"I'm surprised by how quickly we've been able to build trust with our partners and customers," he adds. "The Indiana Economic Development Corporation, the Indiana Small Business Development Center, Elevate Ventures (especially Entrepreneur-in-Residence Eric Steele) — they've all been there to provide support and cheer us on."

Now studying at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University, Ao is looking forward to seeing where Intertwined might go from here.

"There are still a lot of untapped directions we'd like to venture into, like the career and technical education sector, the entrepreneurial market, and after-school clubs," he says. "The movement to require financial literacy education is starting to grow in more states, and we see opportunities opening up as teachers start looking for resources."

IXANA

IS CREATING AN AI CO-PILOT FOR THE PHYSICAL WORLD.

“THERE ARE MANY APPLICATIONS AND MANY OF THEM HAVEN'T BEEN FULLY IMAGINED YET.”

SHREYAS SEN

01	WEST LAFAYETTE	City
02	2020	Founded
03	24	Number of employees
04	IXANA.AI	Web

WRITTEN BY ALLISON TROUTNER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Seyi Okeowo

Imagine a world where you can instantly share your contact information, files, or music with a simple fist bump. It sounds like science fiction. But with patented Wi-R technology, Ixana has made it a reality.

In the 2000s, Bluetooth changed everything about how we share information, listen to music, and connect to the world around us. However, today's wireless devices consume a lot of energy, don't always pair correctly, and require frequent charging.

As he pondered Bluetooth's limitations, engineer Shreyas Sen asked: "Can the body act as a wire?" The human body has always fascinated Sen, founder & CTO of Ixana, and Elmore Associate Professor at Purdue University. He and his colleagues were determined to speed up human-computer interaction (HCI).

The Purdue Research Foundation and Purdue's Office of Technology Commercialization helped Sen file and manage multiple patents for the technology. Sen and his team then participated in the National Science Foundation's (NSF) I-Corps program to explore the product market, and applied to NSF's Small Business Innovation Research program to accelerate commercialization of their concept.

Sen and co-founders Dr. Angik Sarkar and Dr. Shovan Maity were ready to launch Ixana in 2020, dubbing their technology "Wi-R." By placing Wi-R technology into a proprietary semiconductor chip, it can be used in real-world applications, like headsets. Unlike Bluetooth, which creates a 15 to 30-foot radius around the body accessible by anyone within range, the Wi-R wireless signal is confined to the body's surface. Wearing Wi-R headsets, users acquire what Ixana calls an Electronic Nervous System (ENS), so they can instantly share what they're listening to with a friend through a mere high five.

The distributed computing revolution is here, and Ixana's chip is fueling it. Exciting applications include augmented reality AI glasses connected to a "wearable brain," shrinking the distance between our minds and our smartphone processors. Wi-R can feed users real-time information, like an acquaintance's forgotten name. It could send GPS directions to the feet, or automatically records priceless moments like a baby's first steps.

"There are many applications," Sen says. "And many of them haven't been fully imagined yet."

100X
LOWER CONSUMPTION VS
BLUETOOTH

PRESENCE IN
300
HIGH SCHOOLS

JOHNSON- PRENEURS

ASHLEY JOHNSON
IS HELPING STUDENTS
SUCCEED.



ASHLEY JOHNSON

01	GARRETT	City
02	2023	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	JOHNSONPRENEURS.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

High school business teacher Ashley Johnson sees first-hand how quickly the need for career and technical education (CTE) is growing. Many of the outdated resources teachers rely on aren't keeping pace with evolving trends and demand. By building out sets of timely, engaging curriculum for fellow educators, Johnson hopes to help them better prepare students for future success.

"I've always referred to my students as 'Johnsonpreneurs,'" she laughs. "When I was putting my business plan together and deciding on a name, it seemed like the perfect fit."

After testing out and fine-tuning materials in her own classroom, Johnson makes them available on Teachers Pay Teachers, selling 50 to 75 items each month to customers across 35 different states.

"My target audience is high school CTE teachers who are looking for curriculum, lesson plans or professional development in a specific area," she describes.

Although Johnson made her company official at the start of this year, she's been selling curriculum off and on since 2014, crediting her assistant principal Carrie Wisheart with giving her the inspiration to take the leap and grow the hobby into a full-fledged business. In addition to maintaining a full-time teaching

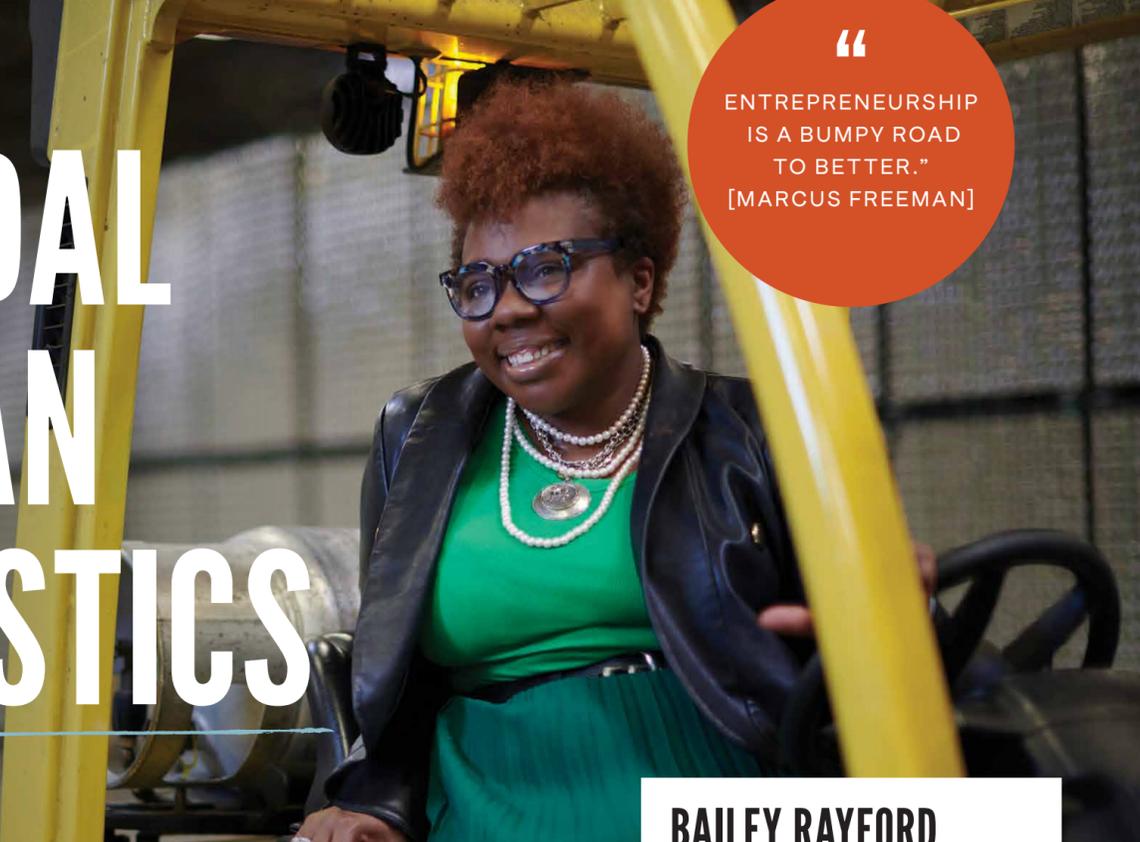
position at DeKalb High School, Johnson supplements her platform with blogging, training sessions, and public speaking engagements.

"Right now, I'm focused on business education aspects — accounting, marketing, entrepreneurship and work-based learning, but there are 16 CTE clusters we could expand into, including agriculture and manufacturing," she says. "As I grow, I'd love to add staff in those areas to offer a more well-rounded portfolio."

The 2022 Northeast Indiana Innovative Teacher of the Year enjoys bouncing ideas off like-minded teachers she's met through Innovate WithIN and the STARTedUP Foundation. Johnson has found the Indiana community supportive and encouraging of her efforts.

"The entrepreneurial climate here has really blossomed in the past few years," she mentions.

KENDAL LOGAN LOGISTICS



BAILEY RAYFORD

01	INDIANAPOLIS	City
02	2021	Founded
03	5	Number of employees
04	KENDALLOGAN.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Esther Boston

WE SERVE BUSINESSES NO
MATTER THEIR SIZE.

Founder and CEO Bailey Rayford launched Indianapolis-based Kendal Logan Logistics in 2021. She saw the opportunity for a logistics company that would help small and mid-size businesses fulfill their supply chain needs. "If a business has a fulfillment need but they're moving fewer than 2,000 units a day, a lot of the larger companies won't work with them," Rayford said. "We want to provide those services and help those companies thrive."

Rayford is a fourth-generation entrepreneur and has vivid memories of her early lessons in the art of running your own business. "My parents owned a commercial landscaping company," Rayford recalls. "They never made my brothers and me leave the room when they had to make hard business decisions. They allowed us to see the emotion of them going through it, bouncing back and going at it again. It helped us understand that's just part of being your own boss."

Rayford wants her children to understand the value of entrepreneurship as well. In two years, Rayford has grown Kendal Logan Logistics (KLL) from a one-woman shop to five full-time employees with the capability to scale up temporarily when demand is high.

One of KLL's early wins was securing a contract with a UK pharmaceutical company that needed a U.S. distributor. "I pulled my daughter out of school because I knew it was a day we were going to remember," Rayford says.

As Kendal Logan Logistics has grown, Rayford has found entrepreneurial support through a wide range of organizations across the state — from workshops and quarterly sessions offered by Business Equity for Indy and Indiana Black Chamber, to Marian University's Diversity in Leadership Program. In addition, Rayford serves on the board of the national non-profit HATCH for Hunger and recently joined Conexus Indiana.

When asked what advice she'd give to budding entrepreneurs, Rayford cited a phrase used by Notre Dame football coach Marcus Freeman. "Entrepreneurship is 'a bumpy road to better.' You have to understand your ebbs and flows and that every day presents new challenges and opportunities."

“
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
IS A BUMPY ROAD
TO BETTER.”
[MARCUS FREEMAN]

FOURTH
GENERATION
ENTREPRENEUR

“
SALES FOR 2023
HAVE ALREADY
TRIPLED 2022.”

2022 INNOVATIVE
TEACHER OF
THE YEAR
NORTHEAST
INDIANA



KINGA SAFETY



YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP.”

WRITTEN BY LAURA MCPHEE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

Ugandan-born Ambrose Kamya has parlayed his hard work, empathy, and tech prowess into a career as the founder of a company for social good. Indiana's entrepreneurial ecosystem supported Kamya's vision every step of the way.

Kinga is a personal safety mobile phone app Kamya first conceived as a way to help the women of his home community combat sexual violence. Bringing his idea to America, and having the tools and resources to develop the app at the University of Notre Dame, reinforced the magnitude of the problem of sexual assault globally for Kamya. This deepened his commitment to finding ways to apply technology as a small part of the solution.

As an undergraduate in Uganda, Kamya received a highly coveted Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders through the U.S. State Department, and was placed in a summer program at the University of Notre Dame. Afterward, Kamya went home to Uganda with the hope of returning to South Bend to continue his education.

His acceptance into the university's graduate entrepreneurial program ESTEEM and access to the IDEA Center (Innovation, De-Risking and Enterprise Acceleration) nurtured his imagination further.

"The IDEA center allowed me to water the seeds," he says. "Having my mentors say 'that's a good idea. Why don't you do some research,' and then having the ability to do that research was key."

After graduation, Kamya found more support and opportunities in northern Indiana including grants from Startup South Bend – Elkhart, the Community Ideation Fund through Elevate Ventures, and the Elevate Nexus Pitch Competition.

Now that his app has finally hit the market, Kamya is devoted to growing the business he has spent five years researching, developing, pitching, and laboring to make a reality, while also working as an economic development specialist for the City of Elkhart.

Kamya's two words of advice to future entrepreneurs? Be coachable. "You have to know when to ask for help," he says. "Progress comes from advisers who have walked the journey and can help you avoid some mistakes...a good team creates momentum, it speeds up everything. If you want to be successful, you can't do it all by yourself."



AMBROSE KAMYA

01	SOUTH BEND	City
02	2022	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	KINGASAFETY.COM	Web

MAIN STREET ASSISTANCE LOAN

NEW ALBANY



WE CONNECT PEOPLE TO RESOURCES OUT THERE TO HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR BUSINESS GOALS NO MATTER HOW BIG OR HOW SMALL... WE WANT TO CREATE OPPORTUNITY IN SOUTHERN INDIANA FOR EVERYONE.”

WORDS BY *Laura McPhee*

Small business ownership is a risk no matter how favorable the conditions. Add a global pandemic to the mix, along with road and bridge infrastructure construction projects in a downtown district partly reliant on foot traffic and tourists. These were the challenges faced by small business owners in and around New Albany's Main Street district as 2022 drew to a close. For some, the loss of business could have meant shuttering their doors for good without some sort of support.

That's when the Board of Directors and staff at One Southern Indiana ("1si") stepped up with a program to help alleviate some of this overwhelming financial burden on the Main Street small business owners.

1si's New Albany Central Business District Loan Program was announced in January 2023. Within two months, 1si distributed more than \$100,000 in microloans to eight small businesses, including Primos Detail Plus and the New Albany Sugar Shoppe.

Specifically for covering overhead and operational costs such as payroll, rent, and utilities, the loans helped keep these brick-and-mortar businesses open throughout the infrastructure projects around them.

Applicants could receive up to \$20,000 at zero percent interest and one year to begin repayment.

"While we knew this program would not meet the needs of every business, it was a lifeline to those who could and did meet the requirements and find relief," says Rachael Armstrong, Small Business Navigator at 1si and the Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

"1si and the SBDC are here to help business owners, no matter if they come in with nothing more than a back-of-the-napkin dream, or a fully operating business with decades of experience," she emphasizes.

"We are the connector piece," says Armstrong. "We connect people to resources out there to help them achieve their business goals no matter how big or how small...we want to create opportunity in Southern Indiana for everyone."

OLLIE LUE SOAP

CREATED WITH YOU AND THE PLANET IN MIND.

“

IN THE LONG RUN IT'S ABOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR SOMEONE WITH EVERYDAY ITEMS.”

769%
YEAR-OVER-YEAR REVENUE GROWTH IN 2022

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Seyi Okeowo*

After Aubrey Lindsey puts her two toddlers to bed, she steps into Ollie Lue Soap Co's main manufacturing headquarters: her 10' x 8' walk-in closet.

During these quiet hours, Lindsey makes 100+ bars of vegan soap and up to 50 soy candles every two weeks. Ollie Lue's products are based on Lindsey's proprietary formulas, drawing on her biology degree from Ball State University, her experience as a lab manager at a biopharma company, and a lifelong battle with allergens found in commercial hygiene products.

As someone with sensitive skin, Lindsey's made her own soap, deodorant, and body butters for over 15 years. It wasn't until 2020, after her son was born and she was furloughed from her job at the lab, that she decided to launch her own business. "I gave the soaps to friends and family, and it blossomed into something I might be able to do for a living, while still staying home with my son," Lindsey says.

Everything about the Ollie Lue brand is an extension of Lindsey — from the allergy-friendly formulation to the company name. "Ollie stands for Oliver, the child we lost between our two children," Lindsey said. "And Lue is for my grandmother, Luella, who used to buy me handmade soaps for Christmas."

Lindsey started Ollie Lue on Etsy, but soon created her own website. "I started selling my

AUBREY LINDSEY

01	NEW CASTLE	City
02	2021	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	OLLIELUESOAPCO.COM	Web

products at the farmer's market in New Castle, which helped me grow exponentially," she says. Building on the close relationships developed with customers at the market, Lindsey started fielding orders for weddings and baby showers, and was able to place Ollie Lue products in Village Creations, a retail storefront in New Castle. Two more storefronts followed. Lindsey joined the New Castle Chamber of Commerce in 2023, crediting the mentorship of Chamber board member Justin Helman with helping her grow her business. In July 2023, she joined GROW: Growing Remarkable Opportunities for Women, a Muncie-based organization. "The amount of knowledge I've gained from GROW is outstanding," Lindsey says. "Marketing, social media, branding, everything like that."

While she'd love to have a dedicated, slightly larger space to make her products, Lindsey is content with Ollie Lue's growth. "In the long run it's about making a difference for someone with everyday items," Lindsey says.

Case in point: "An older gentleman at the farmer's market smelled one of my candles and said, 'Wow, I smelled that and all the sudden I was a kid again, running to the ice cream truck at my grandma's house. I've never had that happen to me before. I just wanted to thank you for that.'"

PARLOR DOUGHNUTS

“

WE'RE JUST AS MUCH ABOUT 'PARLOR' AND COMMUNITY AS WE ARE ABOUT DOUGHNUTS.”

DARRICK & JENNIFER HAYDEN

01	EVANSVILLE	City
02	2019	Founded
03	25	Number of employees
04	PARLORDOUGHNUTS.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY CECE ANDREWS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs*

PARLOR DOUGHNUTS FEEDS AND FOSTERS COMMUNITY.

Darrick and Jennifer Hayden crafted an irresistible doughnut. Their secret ingredient? "Parlor Spirit." With 98 nationwide franchises in 4 years, their success is undeniable. Parlor's recipe for success involves their signature crispy-on-the-outside, buttery-layered-on-the-inside doughnuts, Evansville-roasted coffee, and a deeply rooted value system of community, collaboration, and mentorship.

Parlor Doughnuts evolved from Noah Hayden's original concept, Proper Coffee. "That was always the dream...to put those two things together. Father and son. Coffee and doughnuts," Hayden says.

"We were originally going to expand our corporate business, but part of our DNA is the 'parlor,'" Hayden reflects. "We're just as much about 'parlor' and community as we are about doughnuts. Our goal is to partner strategically with operators who want to carry that spirit into other areas of the country. We can duplicate what we started here in Evansville and successfully replicate that all over Indiana and beyond."

While Parlor Doughnuts has expanded nationwide, Hayden keeps business close to home. All cases, fabrication, menus, windows, and brand distinctives come from Indiana businesses. Proper Coffee, founded by Noah Hayden in 2015, could be roasted anywhere, but they wanted to keep it in Evansville.

Hayden is passionate about mentorship and inspiring a future entrepreneur in his community. "We aim to provide a path for our community to become entrepreneurs themselves," he says. "We have a guy who started working for us in high school in 2019. He then became the general manager, then department manager. Now he has opened his own shop in Indianapolis."

The Haydens have cultivated a culture within their brand, establishing a network within a network. With a commitment to open 230 shops nationwide, their vision for the future is to make a parlor available in every community and give back while they do it.

98
FRANCHISES

"I ASSUMED A MAKERSPACE WAS A GOOD IDEA AND THAT SOMEONE ELSE WOULD DO IT."

PAY IT FORWARD

THAT 'SOMEONE ELSE' NEVER STEPPED UP AND I DIDN'T WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR TALKING, BUT NOT DOING.

I REALIZED THAT THAT 'SOMEONE ELSE' WAS PROBABLY US."

RICHMOND



I SENT AN EMAIL TO 44 PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT THIS IDEA AND NEXT THING I KNOW, WE'VE BOUGHT A 70,000 SQUARE FOOT BUILDING AND ARE APPLYING TO GRANTS TO FINANCE THE BUILD OUT."

Eric Eastman is the co-founder of Green Filing LLC, a startup offering electronic filing of court documents to attorneys. Eric and his co-founder George Knecht built the company out of Richmond, Indiana, and Scottsdale, Arizona, into a multi-million dollar startup. In 2021, Green Filing was acquired by InfoTrack US, Inc. As chief technology officer at Green Filing, Eric's days are taken up with continuing software development and growing the business in the U.S.

As a Richmonder at heart who witnessed the impact of COVID-19 on the local business community, Eric started wondering what it would take to rebuild the once thriving community of creatives, remote workers, tinkerers, makers and entrepreneurs.

"I don't think that retail alone works as an economic driver for main street. If someone wants to buy a certain product, preferably at an affordable price and in a convenient way, they'll likely shop online. It's when the community rallies around small businesses, not just for their products but for an experience of local pride and a sense of belonging, then you've created something that no online retailer can provide."

In their free time, Eric and his wife Becky began to wonder what role they might play in creating a vibrant downtown. For more than two years, they had toyed with the idea of a physical workshop that's accessible to the entire community, "I assumed a makerspace was a good idea and that someone else would do it. For some reason, that 'someone else' never stepped up and I didn't want to be known for talking but not doing. I realized that that 'someone else' was probably us."

One evening, Eric sent out an email to 44 Richmonders who he'd previously talked to. He suggested getting together and discussing in earnest what this type of space could bring to the community. Not long after, a group of twenty dedicated Richmonders convened in person to share their vision. Eric remembers, "I was super encouraged by the outpouring of support for this idea. At the table were twenty different locals from all walks of life who shared vision for what we could do to make Richmond a great place for remote workers and young families."

At the end of May 2023, Eric closed on a 70,000 square foot building on Main Street. After work and on weekends, he and Becky are working on plans for the build-out. With a storefront, freight elevator, overhead door and office space it is an ideal location for Richmond's first makerspace. But for Eric, it's not just about the space. He wants to bring back events that convened the community before the pandemic.

"Pizza Wednesdays used to be a great opportunity for all the remote workers and business owners to come together, share their successes and just be in community. Especially in a small town, that community is key - not only for your local economy but for people to feel welcome, to know that they belong and are part of this town. I want to bring that back. Because we can all work from home, but we can't be in community from our homes."

PEAK MIND

“OUR SOLUTIONS HELP BUSINESSES THRIVE BY MAKING SURE EMPLOYEES FEEL HEARD AND VALUED.”



ALICIA MCKOY

01	CARMEL	City
02	2022	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	JOINPEAKMIND.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Brandon Wright

ALICIA MCKOY IS IMPROVING WORKPLACE WELL-BEING.

For Alicia Mckoy, founder and CEO of Peak Mind, one good thing that came out of the COVID-19 pandemic was letting people know it's ok to not be ok.

"The pandemic thrust mental health into the forefront of the conversation, which was a blessing in disguise," she explains. "With Peak Mind, we create a safe space to be honest about what we're going through and really talk about it."

Mckoy founded the company in 2020, at the height of the coronavirus outbreak, after five years of studying neuropsychology and the connection between brain and behavior on mental health in the workplace.

"I could see workers weren't happy, but they didn't know how to communicate with their employers about it," she recalls. "As a social scientist, I dove into the data and started doing research around what might help."

After spending several years writing a book about workplace wellbeing, Mckoy realized software-as-a-service (SaaS) technology could be used by employers to offer employees on-demand access to immediate well-being solutions. With assistance from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and Elevate Ventures, Mckoy received an Indiana Innovation

Voucher that granted her a year's worth of access to the Emerging Manufacturing Collaborative Center's 5G lab in Indy's 16 Tech District.

"We wouldn't have been able to get the technology we needed without it," she says. "Now, we're at a point of processing and presenting our findings to demonstrate with empirical certainty the value of what we're doing."

Mckoy employs cutting-edge AI-enabled technology and virtual-reality headsets with biometric feedback. She delivers classes and training to improve the mental well-being of a wide range of professionals including teachers, nurses, public safety workers, corporate workers, and anyone who can benefit from a better state of wellbeing. Peak Mind offers employers increased morale and productivity, leading to reductions in sick days, medical claims, and insurance costs ... as well as empowered workforces.

Case in point: "Law enforcement workers see so much stress and trauma," Mckoy points out. "If we want safer neighborhoods, we need to empower our police officers to thrive. We see our company as a social solution."

PHOENIX ELITE GYM

“PUT YOUR FOOT IN THE CEMENT AND MAKE AN IMPRINT FOR OTHER WOMEN WHO ARE OUT THERE TOO.”



MORGAN WILSON

01	TERRE HAUTE	City
02	2020	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	PHOENIXELITEGYM.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

MORGAN WILSON BELIEVES THE GYM IS FOR THE MIND AND BODY.

Morgan Wilson was working as a personal trainer when she realized she had a much bigger purpose. "I wanted to create a fitness environment where people can feel safe," she says. "Some people don't feel at home or are out of place in gyms which are controlled by an environment that doesn't allow them to let go and be free."

In 2020, she opened her own business Phoenix Elite Gym in Terre Haute, Indiana, which focuses on rising again and being reborn. Her work extends beyond the physical components of fitness and exercise. "My clients are there either for the functional side of fitness, or for help with the mental side," she says. "I push that it's just as much physical as it is mental." She concentrates on personal training that not only positively impacts her clients' physical well-being, but also helps them to overcome life issues which allows them to grow as a person. "My best success stories are the ones that improve overall health itself," she says. "It's always nice when someone loses a lot of weight, but my favorite achievement is when someone says they no longer have to take a medication."

Wilson relocated her gym to The Meadows Mall Shopping Center in the heart of Terre Haute and plans to open a second facility that will be an open-style gym. Returning to school to study psychology, her goal is to become a therapist and acquire a property that brings people together to help them achieve their goals. For other business owners, she recommends staying strong and having a purpose. "Being a woman-owned business and especially a minority, it's very important that you stand your ground," she says. "Put your foot in the cement and make an imprint for the other women who are out there too."

TRAINS
70
PEOPLE PER MONTH BETWEEN IN-PERSON AND ONLINE

RECIPIENT OF
INDIANA
INNOVATION
VOUCHER

“THE EARLY CONNECTIONS I MADE HAVE TURNED OUT TO BE REALLY IMPORTANT IN GROWING MY CLINIC.”



PIVOTAL PHYSICAL THERAPY

BRIANNE KELLY

01	MUNCIE	City
02	2021	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	PIVOTAL-PHYSICALTHERAPY.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

BRIANNE KELLY IS HEALING.

From an early age, Brianne Kelly knew she wanted to pursue a career that would allow her to help others.

“In high school, I took a health occupations class and I kept gravitating toward the week-long rotations focused on physical therapy,” says Kelly.

During senior year, Kelly applied to the University of Evansville’s direct-entry Doctor of Physical Therapy program. She earned a bachelor of science degree in 2010 followed by a doctorate of physical therapy in 2012.

After working in clinics for the next seven years, she discovered an industry gap in the treatment of pelvic health when she personally experienced issues following the birth of her son.

“Pelvic health is something that affects men, women, and children throughout their lifetimes,” she says. “The Indiana Licensing Board requires continuing education credits, so I did some of my own training online as a way to self-treat.”

Furloughed and eventually let go from her job during the COVID-19 pandemic while pregnant with her second child, Kelly found herself with an opportunity to consider opening her own practice specializing in pelvic floor physical therapy. It was a pivotal moment.

“I found PTs in other states who owned their own clinics, had a really good work-life balance, and seemed to be providing patient care in a way that aligned with my treatment philosophy,” says Kelly. “That’s what I wanted, so I stepped outside my comfort zone and took an accelerated online physical therapy clinic startup course.”

Joining Women in Business Unlimited in Muncie and connecting with Peggy Cenova, Karen Lloyd, and Judy Porter of the Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) helped Kelly gain valuable support and insights to clarify goals for her new clinic: Pivotal Physical Therapy.

“SBDC has helped me with marketing and administrative tasks, and merged me into local networks I wouldn’t have otherwise connected with,” she adds. “There are still so many resources I haven’t even tapped into yet, but the ones I’ve utilized so far have really paid off.”



RING-CO

“WE’VE LEARNED TO ENJOY BUILDING PRODUCTS FOR OTHER FOLKS AND THAT’S A REALLY NEAT THING.”

CHAD & TRICIA RINGER

01	TRAFALGER	City
02	2014	Founded
03	5	Number of employees
04	RING-CO.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

RING-CO HELPS INNOVATORS MAKE THEIR PRODUCTS COME TO LIFE.

In 2014, Chad and Tricia Ringer sat down at their kitchen table with a white board and wrote down sixty-seven business entity ideas. “Our only objective was we wanted a strong moral and ethical foundation for a company,” Chad says. After talking to mentors and exploring what the market needed, they landed on their company Ring-Co, a woman-owned business that helps Innovators and developers take an idea from concept to commercialization.

Awarded the 2023 Rural Small Business of the Year by the Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the couple’s first design was a terminal truck. They then served as consultants for a Tracked Utility Carrier (TUC) where they acquired two patents, designed it from the ground up and took it to production. Following an initial consultation for a mobile handwashing station, Tricia began exploring an idea for a skin solution product. “Because of COVID, we pivoted and came up with a product formula similar to a surgical scrub,” she says. “We used our product design and development experience to be able to offer the athletic market a solution for skin infections.”

Their product COMPEL resulted from Tricia’s journal entry: ‘I feel compelled to make a difference’.

As an umbrella company for other subsidiaries, Ring-Co products are eventually spun off as their own LLC so they can acquire investments, be built, or sold off. They have participated in Indiana’s gBETA program and sees the state’s Venture Capital Investment Tax Credit (VCI) as a boost for people to invest in the company and its products. The couple’s next focus is growing COMPEL along with the consulting side of the business. “We’ve had the opportunity to do that a couple of different times,” Chad says. “We’ve learned to enjoy building products for other folks and that’s a really neat thing.”

1:1
INDIVIDUALIZED SESSIONS FOR PATIENTS

21
PATENTS

“IT HAS GIVEN A REASON, A PURPOSE, AND AN AWARENESS TO A SIDE OF TOWN THAT HAS BEEN FORGOTTEN ABOUT.”

ROSEBUD COFFEE HOUSE



TIARA HICKS

01	MUNCIE	City
02	2020	Founded
03	9	Number of employees
04	ROSEBUDCOFFEEHOUSE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

TIARA HICKS IS PUTTING SOUTH MUNCIE BACK ON THE MAP.

At the tender age of 12, Tiara Hicks landed her first job in the hospitality industry at a local mom and pop diner. After earning her M.B.A. from Indiana Wesleyan University and working in human resources for various restaurant operations, she set her sights on opening a coffee shop, inspired by her grandfather, a coffee lover and people person.

At the same time, Muncie's non-profit 8Twelve Coalition, convened by Muncie Habitat for Humanity, was seeking collaborations to help revitalize a long-neglected part of town: Muncie's southside, where neighbors were expressing a desire for a gathering place. The stars aligned for Hicks' venture when Innovation Connector's Executive Director & CEO Ted Baker connected Hicks with 8Twelve and helped her secure a Muncie Industrial Revolving Loan Fund to acquire the capital to open her business.

Rosebud Coffee House opened inside a converted vintage bank in 2020 and soon attracted a loyal clientele. To stimulate community, Hicks offers free-to-use meeting spaces, one of them in the old bank vault. A strong supporter of other entrepreneurs, Hicks

sells locally made jewelry, journals, candles, and crocheted stuffed animals, and lines the walls with work by area artists.

Everyone hopes Rosebud's momentum will encourage more businesses to open in an often-ignored area of Muncie. "[Rosebud] really aligned with facilitating and bringing people together, breaking down barriers, and encouraging people to cross the railroad tracks to the southside of town," Hicks says. "There is still opportunity, and it has given a reason, a purpose, and an awareness to a side of town that has been forgotten about when it comes to development."

In 2022, Hicks received the Innovation Center's award for Entrepreneur of the Year. She is looking at expanding Rosebud Coffee House to other locations along with purchasing a coffee trailer to be more mobile and visible within the community. "I'm here because somebody helped me," she says. "And I'm here to help others as much as possible."

33%
GROWTH YOY

SLEEP EASY TECHNOLOGY



“EVERYONE 'S LOOKING FOR EVERYONE ELSE TO SUCCEED.” [IN INDIANA]

ANTHONY & AARON ESPLIN

01	SOUTH BEND	City
02	2021	Founded
03	5	Number of employees
04	OXYLLOWSYSTEM.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

ANTHONY AND AARON ESPLIN ARE HELPING PEOPLE BREATHE EASY.

Biomedical engineer Anthony Esplin had a neighbor whose child struggled with oxygen therapy and set out to find a better solution. "I thought there has to be something that can give him his therapy without having to put tubes up his nose," Esplin says. Working alongside his brother Aaron, the two created the first oxygen therapy pillow and their South Bend company, Oxyllow System, can now retrofit any standard-sized pillow in order to create oxygen rich pockets while a person sleeps without the use of tubes.

By connecting with durable medical equipment (DME) companies and Pulmonologists in the area, they contacted people to use the initial versions of the product to develop the final iteration, which is now in its first production run. The next phase will be working through direct-to-consumer online sales, institutional partners, and conducting beta pilots in nursing care facilities in order to move into business-to-business sales. "We'll transition into more standard medical device sales, which will include nursing care and

hospital facilities, and durable medical equipment," Esplin says. "Our first version of the product was specifically for side and stomach sleepers, and we next have a version designed for back sleepers."

Originally from Idaho, Esplin received a Notre Dame scholarship for their graduate program ESTEEM (Engineering, Science and Technology Entrepreneurship Excellence Masters). The company has continued to work closely with Notre Dame along with Elevate Ventures. Esplin sees the introductions from these various connections as helping to propel Oxyllow System forward. "The interesting thing about owning a business in Indiana is the collaboration in terms of if someone knows someone within their network, they'll connect you," he says. "That's been pretty consistent the last two and a half years, that everyone's looking for everyone else to succeed."

FIRST
OXYGEN THERAPY
PILLOW EVER
CREATED



SOULFUL KITCHEN



WE'RE GAME CHANGERS WITH ONE AIM: HELPING FELLOW FOODIES GET TO THE NEXT LEVEL."

WRITTEN BY LAVANYA NARAYANAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

Feeding others. That's all that's been on South Bend entrepreneur Laquisha Jackson's mind, since she was 9 years old.

"It came naturally to me — I was trained by my grandmother, Bonnie Jean Walker. In the kitchen, every day," recalls Jackson, who was cooking full-course meals by the time she was 12.

Her passion took her through kitchens around the city of South Bend, all the way to an Ivy Tech hospitality administration and, soon, to a culinary school degree. "I've worked in kitchens for 16 years, cooking for the elderly, making dishes healthy while also staying true to the [southern] cuisine of my roots," explains Jackson. So at a crossroads in her life, the mother of eight and self-described dreamer decided to start her own catering company called Soulful Kitchen LLC.

"I always knew I wanted to open a business, so I enrolled in a lot of classes and certificates," she says, leveraging every opportunity available: St. Mary's College SPARK Business Accelerator, the Applied Entrepreneurship Program offered through Regional Innovation & Startup Education (RISE), HustleSBE (a program for minority and female business owners), the Latin American Chamber of Commerce Empresarios Certification, R2 Mastermind, Women's Initiative Mentoring, and Notre Dame Bootcamp. She credits them all with delivering the bare bones knowledge about business ownership, from using a spreadsheet to marketing.

"Each class had a special touch, from inviting local influencers in the community to come in and share their knowledge, to giving us different nuggets of wisdom that help entrepreneurs grow."

Jackson is already positioning her company as way more than a catering firm, because giving back runs in her blood just as much as cooking. "We're game changers with one aim: helping fellow foodies get to the next level." From offering cooking classes to providing serve-safe training, Jackson utilizes her business to help people in the industry, but she doesn't stop there.

"I also founded Hope for the Hungry, a not-for-profit that is aimed at helping families suffering from food insecurity," she says. "We host a pantry in the Near Northwest Neighborhood Community Center once a month and are currently looking for a space to launch our next set of initiatives like diabetes prevention classes, a soup kitchen, and a pantry that provides fresh and organic produce to the community," Jackson states proudly.

Her work inspires others ready to lead their communities to better nourishment by fighting food deserts and hunger, busting down barriers to better health, and feeding the mind and body. When asked for her life's mantra, Jackson replies: "To whom much is given, much is required."



LAQUISHA JACKSON

01	SOUTH BEND	City
02	2018	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	SOULFULKITCHENS.B.COM	Web



“
WE CONNECT YOU
WITH RESOURCES
TO GET YOU WHERE
YOU WANT TO GO.”

ACCESS TO
600+
FACULTY
MEMBERS

SERVING
18
CLIENTS
IN 2023

CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs*

It can take a village to launch a new business venture. That's where the University of Southern Indiana's (USI) Center for Applied Research (CAR) comes in.

Part of the school's Outreach and Engagement mission, the center — founded by future lieutenant governor Dr. Sue Ellspermann in 2005 — acts as a clearinghouse to connect aspiring entrepreneurs with the services, people, and tools they need to get their ideas to market.

"Most clients want to know if their product can viably exist in the real world," says Steven Stump, CAR director and USI graduate. "We work with them to determine what their next steps should be."

After getting a clear picture in mind as to the client's goals, timeframe, and budget through an initial discussion at no cost, Stump offers a choice of CAR options that include consulting with a pool of 600+ USI faculty members, hiring USI student labor on an hourly basis, or tying research and development into USI class curriculum over the course of a semester. CAR services may additionally include use of campus laboratories or equipment such as 3D printers that clients may not otherwise be able to access.

"We really figure out how to best support the entrepreneurial ecosystem," Stump explains. "Because these are startups that don't often have much funding to work with, we try to keep their costs as low as possible."

Thanks to a network of relationships with regional partners on and off campus, Stump's office puts clients in touch with other sources and facilities that can position them for success. The Center can also help clients write grant proposals, structure business plans, and uncover potential sources of funding.

At present, the CAR is working with around 18 clients, mostly based in the Evansville/southern Indiana area. Although Stump can't reveal too many details on the works in progress, he says many are engineering-related and range from therapeutic medical devices and exercise equipment, to web sites and apps.

"While none of our clients have become what you might consider a large-scale success story yet, we have several that are on the cusp and we are excited to see the success of their products."

Certified with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Community Engagement Classification, USI strives to add value to the greater community through the Center for Applied Research and other initiatives like veteran services, continuing education and corporate training.

UTOPIAN COFFEE

“THE MORE COFFEE WE CAN BUY FROM FARMERS AROUND THE WORLD, THE MORE IMPACT WE CAN HAVE.”



BRENDON MAXWELL

01	FORT WAYNE	City
02	2012	Founded
03	15	Number of employees
04	UTOPIANCOFFEE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

UTOPIAN COFFEE CREATES CAREERS, NOT JOBS.

Fort Wayne native Brendon Maxwell was living in northern California when he contacted his cousin Patrick back home in Indiana with an idea for starting a web-based coffee company. After Patrick connected with a local coffeemaker to learn how to roast, what started with \$750 and as a side project now includes a wholesale and gifting division with the goal of marrying quality coffee products with ethical initiatives.

Utopian Coffee has the motto of creating careers not jobs and focuses not only on who they are sourcing from, but also ensuring it is sustainable and making an impact on the local people. “We’ve been working to convert cocaine farms to coffee crops in Colombia,” Maxwell says. “We’re also working with a cooperative in Guatemala that helps women obtain land ownership rights, and in Rwanda where previously warring ethnicities came together to create a female-owned coffee cooperative.”

Through an economic development loan from Fort Wayne’s Community Development Corporation (CDC), Utopian Coffee obtained the capital to purchase its first roaster. They moved into The Landing - a 100-year-old abandoned warehouse that was part of a downtown historic renovation project - where they roast their beans and house a brick-and-mortar café.

Continuing to build a strong internal team, the company has started attracting talent from outside the area, and Maxwell believes as the state and its cities continue to improve - specifically in some of the downtown development - Indiana is becoming a really attractive place to live. This helps Utopian Coffee and the team be able to further focus on their global initiatives. “The more coffee we can buy from farmers from around the world, the more impact we can have,” Maxwell says. “We strive to better understand the ecosystem at the origin, so that we can positively transform lives through coffee.”

PROJECTED TO ROAST
300K
POUNDS IN 2023

YOKE SOCIAL TABLE

“IN KOKOMO, IT’S A BEAUTIFUL TIME TO START A BUSINESS.”



ELVIN GUTIERREZ & ANTHONY WALKER

01	KOKOMO	City
02	2022	Founded
03	6	Number of employees
04	YOKESOCIALTABLE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Polina Osharov

LIGHTENING THE BURDEN THROUGH GOOD FOOD.

There is something spiritual about bringing people together over food. For Elvin Gutierrez and Anthony Walker, Yoke Social Table is much more than a restaurant: it’s a cultural reset for the restaurant industry in Kokomo. By centering the humanity of the staff, crafting vibrant food, and making sure customers feel appreciated, Yoke’s owners are serving up an abundance of positivity.

After crossing paths while working in a large corporate restaurant, Gutierrez and Walker decided to build a business that cultivated joy on both sides of the counter. As budding entrepreneurs with treasure troves of sweat equity amassed from years of gritty kitchen work behind the scenes, Gutierrez and Walker make one thing clear with Yoke Social Table: building a place where the community can come together to enjoy a meal is more valuable than building a corporate machine.

Enter Yoke Social Table.

Six months in as operating restaurateurs, with 27,000 meals served, the partners have learned that their power lies in the resources and the people of their Kokomo community. Out

of the gate, their first and most crucial support came from the Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Kokomo. SBDC has been a one stop shop for everything they’ve needed to build and sustain a successful business. Their SBDC business advisor has been a secret weapon, providing business advice, guidance, and networking support that has helped the Yoke team feel confident in their work.

Another crucial resource has been the City of Kokomo administrative offices. From the City’s zoning office to the Mayor’s office and the City Council, the Yoke Social Table team has learned the intricacies of what it means to run a community business. The city has been with them every step of the way, providing support for their buildout and helping the Yoke team learn from mistakes.

As Anthony said, it’s a beautiful time to start a business in Kokomo and that is because of the breadth of indispensable support for business owners that permeates across the city. The cycle continues, as Yoke supports the citizens of Kokomo with killer power bowls and sandwiches, generous community engagement, and seriously good energy.

67%
SALES INCREASE
FROM MONTH
1 - 2



ZINGARI MAN



ZINGARI MAN IS DEFINITELY ON ITS OWN ROCKET SHIP, LEAVING THE SCENT OF CITRUS AND SANDALWOOD IN ITS WAKE.”

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs*

There are many ways that people find their way to entrepreneurship. Heather Melton's background in lab science and love for cooking and crafting led her to dabble in concocting skincare products for the fun of it while still working full time as a hospital lab technician and mom.

Then when her bearded husband Mike needed shaving products without harsh chemicals, she began in earnest creating men's grooming products, combining her clinical pathology savvy with a creative artisan vibe. Melton started the first version of Zingari Man in 2014. She was enjoying herself but not turning a profit.

In 2018, she decided to re-brand, connecting with the Evansville chapter of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) to re-write her business plan and hone in on marketing strategy. As a result, she changed the business name to Zingari Man (zingari means "wanderer"). She devoted herself to the business full-time, and shifted from hobbying to generating income.

Her products range from after shave balms made with witch hazel and white willow bark extract — to creatively named beard elixirs

("The Gent") and shave soap ("The Watchman"), all crafted by hand.

One of the most rewarding stops on her journey has been the growth of Zingari Man's consumer base from the local Indianapolis market to the global market.

As it stands, about 30% of Zingari Man's annual revenue is generated from an international consumer base. Though global sales were not part of Melton's initial business plan, working with the IN-STEP (Indiana State Trade Export & Promotion Program) enabled her to envision a non-American audience for Zingari Man products, by catering to the natural and organic market, and to an unlikely niche of people who intentionally collect unique shaving products.

For the last two years, Melton has worked with distributors in the European Union and the United Kingdom, and is currently working to expand into Southeast Asia and the United Arab Emirates.

Zingari Man is definitely on its own rocket ship, leaving the scent of citrus and sandalwood in its wake.



HEATHER MELTON

01	EVANSVILLE	City
02	2018	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	ZINGARIMAN.COM	Web

MILESTONE 03

GROWTH

BRITT'S BLOOMING BOUTIQUE

“ A LOT OF BUSINESS OWNERS ARE HERE TO OFFER SUPPORT... AND HELP MAKE IT HAPPEN.”

BRITTANY OVERSHINER

- 01 GREENCASTLE City
- 02 2022 Founded
- 03 1 Number of employees
- 04 BRITTSBLOOMINGBOTIQUE.COM Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

BRITTANY OVERSHINER CREATES AN EMPOWERING SHOPPING EXPERIENCE.

Greencastle resident Brittany Overshiner's mother owned a laundry business and the two had always discussed combining it with a clothing boutique. After losing her mom in 2018, Brittany mustered the inspiration to launch her own entrepreneurial dream. "My mom and I were very close," she says. "After she passed away, I took a few weeks to reflect on life and at that point decided, now is the time."

While still working a full-time job, she utilized Facebook Live to sell clothing from her home, and eventually purchased an Amish cabin for her private property that served as the first Britt's Blooming Boutique store location. In September 2022, the business moved to a storefront on Greencastle's downtown square.

Brittany aimed to create a shopping experience that empowers women to love their bodies, along with an inclusive environment that makes people feel comfortable. By March 2023, Brittany was ready to relocate to a larger location on the square, expanding from less than 500 to over 1,500 square feet. Carrying a variety of sizes from small to 3X, Britt's Blooming Boutique also offers children's

clothing, accessories — some made by local vendors — and recently added a men's clothing line.

She also offers a unique mobile experience, inviting customers to book a trailer filled with apparel and accessories to show up at their next private party. The pop-up trailer comes out for local fairs and festivals, too.

The Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and its resources were key to helping Britt's Blooming Boutique's rapid growth as well. Brittany now serves as a board member for Greencastle's Chamber of Commerce, representing small businesses and has helped launch a Women in Business program to mentor future entrepreneurs.

"I want other entrepreneurs to know that no matter your age, your ethnicity, or your background: you can do it," she says. "A lot of business owners are here to offer support and there are resources, mentors, and people like me to offer encouragement and help make it happen."

BURKE METAL WORK

“ BUSINESSES SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN INDIANA.”

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

ANGIE AND WES BURKE ARE CARVING MEMORIES.

In 2017, Angie and Wes Burke's first major purchase as a newly married couple was a CNC plasma table — a machine that allows for precision metal cutting. Determined to make it pay for itself, the two learned the application software and that year made holiday gifts for friends and family. By the following spring, they had opened an Etsy shop to sell their creations. Burke Metal Work was on the scene.

Specializing in metal Christmas ornaments, personalized home décor and logos, the Burkes can engrave text on items to make each one unique. From the American flag rendered in metal as patriotic wall art, to metal keychains shaped as video game controllers or tear-drop campers, the Burkes turn metal into charm. "We design and make everything ourselves and we're not outsourcing," says Angie. In addition to Etsy, Burke Metal Work items can now be found on Amazon Handmade, at local fairs and festivals, and on their business website.

In 2022, the Burkes were one of 10 companies out of 50 applicants selected for gBETA Indiana's Digital Marketing Program which allowed them to learn the latest best practices in marketing and connect with other Indiana entrepreneurs and companies. They

have since begun reaching out to other area businesses for partnerships to sell their products. "Businesses support each other in Indiana," Angie says. "There are stores that like to sell products that are made locally and we're a perfect fit, because we make all our products right here in Attica, Indiana."

The couple next hopes to expand into the wholesale realm and plans to address their seasonal gaps in demand with another service: using their equipment to make parts. "For any business that has a need for laser cut parts," Wes says, "we can manufacture those pieces for them based on the equipment and capabilities we have."

ANGIE & WES BURKE

- 01 ATTICA City
- 02 2017 Founded
- 03 4 Number of employees
- 04 BURKEMETALWORK.COM Web

30K+ SHIPPED TO US AND CANADA

500 TO 1500 SQ. FT. LOCATION EXPANSION IN 2023

TIM COMES FROM A FAMILY THAT VALUES WORK AND EMILY COMES FROM A FAMILY OF ENTREPRENEURS.

CLEAN SLATE BRUSH CONTROL

TIM & EMILY MARTIN

01	NEW CASTLE	City
02	2022	Founded
03	10	Number of employees
04	CLEANSLATEBRUSHCONTROL.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

TIM MARTIN IS CLEARING THE PATH.

Tim Martin grew up clearing brush with his dad on job sites in his native Nebraska. After becoming a master technician of bulldozers and other heavy automotive equipment in his twenties — the highest level he could attain in his career — he transitioned to sales. There he learned the entrepreneurial side of the brush clearing business and he recognized that he enjoyed making his own schedule and impressing customers. The entrepreneur bug caught him, and from there, he and his wife launched Clean Slate Brush Control LLC in 2022.

One major goal for Martin was to build a company that prioritized hiring local community members. In less than two years, he's been able to grow to an employee base of 10 and a fleet of five bucket trucks. To get to this point, Tim needed a number of different resources. As a new entrepreneur, he knew that networking was a critical component for success. Thanks to the New Castle-Henry County Chamber of Commerce, Tim was able to take free business classes and network with other area entrepreneurs.

His most pressing need, though, was for box trucks. Box trucks are the lifeblood of his business as they carry the equipment necessary to each jobsite. To break through the high cost barrier, Martin was able to secure financing through Alabama-based Altec Capital to get the resources he needed.

Today, Martin and the Clean Slate team have cleared more than 50 miles of power lines and recently completed their largest contract ever, with their local New Castle rural electric cooperative. With support from the community, Martin sees a clear path ahead for Clean Slate Brush Control.

50
MILES OF POWER LINES
CLEARED

“

[INDIANA SBDC] HELPS ANYONE WITH A BUSINESS IDEA ON WHERE TO START.”

DAISY'S DOGGIE DAYCARE



APRIL MEYER

01	BATESVILLE	City
02	2018	Founded
03	9	Number of employees
04	DAISYS-DOGGIE-DAYCARE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Seyi Okeowo

DAISY'S DOGGIE DAYCARE TREATS YOUR PET LIKE FAMILY.

April Meyer had 20 years of service at the med-tech firm Hill-Rom and was still employed full-time when she began pet sitting in her home. Knowing in her bones that she wanted to own her own business, she began exploring demand among Batesville dog owners for a safe place to send their fur babies while on vacation, during emergencies, or for socialization.

After Business Advisor Ginnie Faller of the Southeast Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) helped Meyer create a business plan, secure a location, and obtain a small business loan, Meyer and her husband Joe opened their first Daisy's Doggie Daycare facility in 2018.

While the 2020 COVID pandemic was challenging for the business, it eventually offered a unique opportunity due to an increase in dogs adopted during that time. As owners who were constantly at home gradually returned to work, dogs became anxious and were left unsocialized. In 2021, the Meyers opted to open their second location in Greensburg with both facilities conveniently offering boarding, daycare,

and grooming. "The dogs play at daycare and owners don't have to take them somewhere else to get groomed," Meyer says.

Meyers recently added an app-based booking feature for customers, and the staff loves to send pics and videos of pooches to keep owners posted. Meyers' next goal is to reinvest back into the business by upgrading their equipment (such as dog beds), and excavating the outside area to make it usable in all four seasons. And Daisy's Doggie Daycare is making an unexpected impact: mentoring Batesville high school students who work at the daycare, Meyer is encouraging the next generation of veterinarians, vet techs, and groomers.

For future entrepreneurs, Meyers advises them to be patient, find what the community needs, and work with an advisor like Faller. "Ginnie helps anyone with a business idea on where to start," she says. "I wouldn't be anywhere without her."

2ND

LOCATION
OPENED IN
GREENSBURG

DART CREATIVE MEDIA



DARTANYAN ABNEY

01	VINCENNES	City
02	2020	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	DARTANYANAABBEY.MYPORTFOLIO.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

DARTANYAN ABNEY IS FOSTERING COLLABORATION.

Dartanyan Abney began working in graphic design and logo creation while still a high school student in Walton, Indiana. After relocating to attend Vincennes University, he fell in love with the local community and launched his business, Dart Creative Media. Building upon his graphic design expertise, Abney assists clients with brand identification, content creation, and social media performance. "Social media is one of the best ways to explain how to have a virtual presence and interact with the community," he says. "Working with businesses who may not be quite ready for a marketing team, I can walk them through that process, and encourage them to invest money into someone local who can create better content and find different ways to connect with the public."

Operating out of the co-working space The Pantheon, Abney has created educational programs to help build a community of local graphic designers and social media experts. "Having a co-working center and business incubator right here on Main Street in Vincennes

has allowed me to work with different business owners," he says. "We took a general idea of becoming an educational platform through group education, and now we're all learning from our different stories and different backgrounds."

Abney has organized various programs and functions at The Pantheon, along with a local art walk for First Fridays. This created an event side to his business which he hopes to grow in the future. "There are a lot of outlets where it's not only coming up with marketing materials, but also hosting events and growing the creative communities," he says. "I want to be someone who people can turn to for creative businesses advising, and how they can grow their virtual presence and outreach in order to find different ways to connect with the community."

DG VISIONARIES



“
DON'T BE AFRAID
TO STEP OUTSIDE
THE BOX IN
ORDER TO CREATE
SOMETHING NEW.”

DERALD GRAY

01	ELKHART	City
02	2020	Founded
03	7	Number of employees
04	DGVISIONARIES.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

DERALD GRAY IS BRINGING VISIONS TO LIFE.

Elkhart native Derald Gray was studying video production at Ball State University when he tried his hand at DJing. "I started DJing at different events and parties for my fraternity and really found a love for it," he says. He didn't think it would become his profession until landing a career-defining internship in Michigan. "I worked as an intern for a wedding DJ company and could see myself doing it as a career."

After graduation, Gray returned to Elkhart to work in video production at a local news station while he began building relationships around the Michiana area. In January 2020, Gray launched DG Visionaries LLC. His company's first DJing job was for a high school friend's wedding, and from there he received leads for other events. It quickly grew from a part-time job to a full-blown career and now includes a team of four DJs, two videographers, and a wedding planner focused on making movies of and soundtracks for anyone's epic occasion.

Gray credits the Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce for providing the necessary support to create his LLC and register with the secretary of state. The mentoring and coaching programs provided by SCORE (Service Corps

of Retired Executives) helped guide his vision statement and business plan. "I never thought that I would have a team...I thought it would just be me doing DJing on the side with another full-time job," he says. "Those were the foundations that really helped me transition into doing this full-time and getting the business on its feet."

Next, Gray hopes to expand to other Midwest cities, cover destination weddings, and eventually DJ internationally. He encourages other entrepreneurs to believe in their vision, and if they enjoy doing something, find a way to share that joy with others. "Don't be afraid to step outside the box in order to create something new for the people you serve," he says. "You'll be surprised at how many people are willing to pay for something that they can only get from you."

350+
EVENTS BOOKED
SINCE 2020

“
I WANT TO BE
SOMEONE WHO
PEOPLE CAN TURN
TO FOR CREATIVE
BUSINESS
ADVISING.”

ELMER PETERSBURG BUCHTA TECHNOLOGY CENTER



THE CENTER CURRENTLY HOSTS 15 COWORKING MEMBERS INCLUDING MOM WATER, A SOUTHERN INDIANA BASED COMPANY PRODUCING FRUIT INFUSED VODKA WATER.”

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs*

For those in small rural communities, entrepreneurship is often perceived as inaccessible and unworthy of the risks associated with it. In Pike County, a Southwestern Indiana county with a strong history of coal mining, the Elmer Buchta Technology Center (EBTC) is working to dispel these myths to make the path of entrepreneurship more accessible to everyday folks. With a facility that is just over two years old, the center is a coworking space, maker-space equipped with a 3D printer, event venue, startup incubator, and more!

The EBTC was developed when a Project Lead the Way Instructor and a group of Pike Central High School volunteers recognized that the entrepreneurial spirit and tenacity of the students had no outlet. There was a question of what Pike County had to offer students interested in entrepreneurship once they graduated from high school. Now, the EBTC is the answer to that question.

Thanks to a grant from the US Economic Development Administration, support from local businesses, and a major gift from Elmer and Judy Buchta Jr, the EBTC is serving a range of community members such as local small businesses, nonprofits, entrepreneurs, startups, individuals needing office space as well as local universities; providing a facility, entrepreneurial education, and hope. The center currently hosts 15 coworking members including Mom Water, a Southern Indiana based company producing fruit infused vodka water.

One key aspect of the facility's success has been their relationship development with the Pike Community. The center invites local students to engage with the space on tours and provides opportunities for them to use the space for club activities. The local community is the space's beating heart. Bridget Butcher, Program Coordinator, and main staffer for the facility, prioritizes educating community members to make them feel welcome in the space.

Using resources such as the Indiana Coworking Passport, Bridget connects with other coworking facilities to glean advice and strategies for tailoring the space to the needs of the community. The facility's identity as a coworking space in a small rural community poses unique challenges and opportunities. This is why the center prioritizes educating everyone interested in learning about the center and the entrepreneurial mindset.



FURNITURE & THINGS

ERIC KIMMEL IS PRESERVING CRAFTSMANSHIP.



ERIC KIMMEL

01	NORTH VERNON	City
02	2015	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	FURNITUREANDTHINGS.ORG	Web

WRITTEN BY LAURA MCPHEE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

While entrepreneurship requires innovation, it's tricky to know when not to dismiss techniques that have worked for centuries in favor of the latest trends.

Navigating this space between the new and the innovative was the challenge Eric Kimmel embraced when opening Furniture & Things in North Vernon in 2015.

"I was fed up selling disposable, low quality furniture for ridiculous prices," he says. "Big American furniture companies continue to go out of business because they can't compete with cheaper manufacturers and it's the consumer who loses."

Kimmel had decades of experience in sales when he and his wife Michelle moved to Southern Indiana to be closer to family. Much of that experience was in the furniture business, and when he decided to become his own boss, he knew exactly what would set him apart from his competitors.

"I wanted to work with quality American and Amish furniture makers — American and Amish craftsmen," says Kimmel. "I wanted to work with third generation table makers dedicated to what is nearly a lost art."

Contracting directly with local, smaller makers has allowed Kimmel to stock Furniture & Things with quality products, unencumbered by corporate overhead and interest. He is then able to pass the lower cost and higher

quality directly to his customers. Not paying his sales staff based on commission has also made a difference, both in the customer experience and his sales.

These efforts have not gone unnoticed in his community. In 2017, Kimmel was awarded the Thriving Small Business Award from the Southeast Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

And while he is grateful for the recognition, he is also grateful for the many opportunities and resources the SBDC provides him and other small business owners in Southern Indiana.

"Success in small business means utilizing as many opportunities as possible," says Kimmel. "You're in for an uphill battle. It is a huge commitment, and these resources will help you over big hurdles."

“SUCCESS IN SMALL BUSINESS MEANS UTILIZING AS MANY OPPORTUNITIES AS POSSIBLE.”

2017
THRIVING SMALL BUSINESS AWARD
S.E. INDIANA
SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

INFOSENTIENCE



“THIS IS SOMETHING OUT THERE IN THE WORLD DOING STUFF NOBODY ELSE CAN DO.”

STEVE WASICK

01	BLOOMINGTON	City
02	2012	Founded
03	4	Number of employees
04	INFOSENTIENCE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY LAVANYA NARAYANAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

LANGUAGE BRINGS DATA TO LIFE.

Steve Wasick recognized the challenge of effective data analysis in an unlikely place — his fantasy football league. "I barely even knew what was happening with my team, let alone with other teams," he says.

He could have combed through the box scores to find relevant stats for his players, but combing through rows of numbers pales in comparison to the adrenaline rush of an unexpected underdog win or the soul-crushing news of a favorite player's injury. "People like to go onto a website with headlines and pictures that tell you the top stories," he says. "They don't want to create the stories themselves."

In 2012, Wasick developed a computer system that generates relevant automated narrative content from raw fantasy sports data, allowing him to trade back-page box scores for a "front-page" experience. Over time, Wasick advanced the system's capabilities. Today, infoSenticence uses Data Generative AI (D-GAI) technology to put complex data into the context of overall trends, outputting compelling content for clients like CBS Sports' fantasy and real-world sports news.

Since initial seed money support from friends and family in 2012, the infoSenticence team has bootstrapped its way to success and leverages valuable networking opportunities at The Mill co-working space in Bloomington.

Recently, the tech company signed a contract with the Chicago Mercantile Exchange to build an automated website that will ingest more than 50 gigabytes of commodity market data and report in real-time with headlines, pictures, and videos. "It's an entirely new way to get news, and we're really excited about it," says Wasick.

infoSenticence will be rolling out even more sports content by 2024, which will position the company for a propulsive "hello, world!" moment, inviting prospects to see what infoSenticence's transformative AI technology is capable of. "This isn't a prototype," Wasick says. "This is something out there in the world doing stuff nobody else can do."

200M
UNIQUE REPORTS DELIVERED

J'S BREAKFAST CLUB

JOSLYN KELLY IS REVITALIZING HER COMMUNITY.

JOSLYN KELLY

01	GARY	City
02	2015	Founded
03	8	Number of employees
04	JSBREAKFASTCLUBGARY.COM	Web

75%
GROWTH YEAR-OVER-YEAR

“EVERYTHING I AM AND ALL OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AFFORDED ME HAVE COME FROM THIS COMMUNITY.”

WRITTEN BY LAURA MCPHEE

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

J's Breakfast Club is the brainchild and passion project of Joslyn Kelly, a Gary native who turned personal tragedy into an opportunity to nurture her community and in turn heal herself by helping others.

In 2014, Kelly lost her son to suicide and six months later, lost her job. When her world stopped spinning, she was determined to spend the remainder of her time “living to love and loving to live.”

With family roots steeped in hospitality and the food industry, Kelly rediscovered her passion and launched a long-time dream of owning her own restaurant. It wasn't simply a business idea but also a way of helping to reinvest in a city far too many have given up on.

“I was born and raised, and have spent most of my life in Gary,” says Kelly. “Everything I am and all of the opportunities afforded me have come from this community.”

When J's Breakfast Club first opened in 2015, it was takeout only. Cooking meals at home can be hard work; Kelly's vision was to make life easier for people already working long hours.

But her food was so good and the community was so eager for a good-vibes place to gather, Kelly realized people were eating her takeout food on the spot: “Nobody wanted to leave!” she recalls.

So Kelly leaned further into entrepreneurship. She participates in a variety of accelerator programs including the Gary Micro-Enterprise Initiative, Doordash Accelerator for Restaurants, Chicago YMCA Breedlove Entrepreneurship Program, and most recently, the Goldman Sachs 10K Small Business Program.

With these programs and support, Kelly continues to grow the vision for her brand with an intent to improve the economic conditions within her community. She was also the recipient of a \$25,000 Powershift Entrepreneurship Grant courtesy of the NAACP and Shark Tank's Daymond John.

As of February 2023, J's Breakfast Club, now full-service, has been serving up chicken and waffles (and more) to hungry neighbors and travelers at its prominent new location, while inspiring a renewed vitality along Broadway, gateway to the heart of the city and just blocks from I-65 and I-80/94.

“It's about giving people hope,” Kelly says. “And it's about inspiring positivity through love. You give people a good meal, a table to eat it at, and a community that supports them, and good things will happen.”

LANGUAGE MATTERS

EQUIPS CITIES TO BRIDGE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE BARRIERS.

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Polina Osherov

While growing up in his native Chile, Lucas Fonseca dreamed about teaching English overseas. When he arrived on the Grace College campus in Warsaw, Indiana his freshman year, his goal morphed to finding a way to help more international students like himself access the opportunities of American higher education. Then while studying entrepreneurial management, he realized an even greater need existed for English and Spanish tutoring services right in Warsaw.

“There are a lot of families who have been in the U.S. for a while who don't have access to basic services,” Fonseca says. “It's things that are so simple for English speakers to do, such as get a permit from the city or ask about the trash pickup schedule.”

He launched Language Matters in 2018 during his sophomore year, translating documents, and consulting and teaching Spanish and French. As he interacted with more immigrant families, a lightbulb went off.

Rather than “putting a patch” on the challenges immigrants face, Fonseca wanted to create a long-lasting solution to equip the city with the resources and services needed to make immigrants feel welcome. So Language Matters conducted “boots on the ground” research with the Hispanic community in Warsaw to pinpoint the areas of greatest need.

“The most wonderful part about the study is that we met with people where they felt comfortable,” Fonseca recalls. “We talked to people at their churches and in their homes,

where they were able to have some hard conversations.”

Fonseca developed a strategic plan of action based on the research: translating city documents into Spanish, implementing a social media campaign in Spanish to promote the city's signature events, and proposing a a bilingual call center.

“It's been wonderful,” Fonseca said. “We've been able to create an initiative that's helping a lot of people.”

Over the last six years, Language Matters has grown to 10 employees and Fonseca has tapped into the resources available to entrepreneurs in Indiana to refine the company's key offerings. He received consulting from startup accelerators gener8tor and Indianapolis-based NEXT Studios, where he participated in a workshop to pressure-test his ideas.

“Tom Kilcoyne and John McDonald, the managing entrepreneurs at NEXT, saved me a lot of mistakes and time with their advice,” Fonseca says.

He also credits Dr. Roger Bingham of Liberty University, a mentor from his college days, with helping him make fateful decisions as he continues to grow Language Matters.

“These are 30-minute meetings that can change my business for the next three years,” says Fonseca. “I'm very thankful for Dr. Bingham and all the people that have challenged me along the way.”

LUCAS FONSECA

01	FORT WAYNE	City
02	2018	Founded
03	10	Number of employees
04	LANGUAGE MATTERS PROGRAMS.COM	Web

“IT'S BEEN WONDERFUL. WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO CREATE AN INITIATIVE THAT'S HELPING A LOT OF PEOPLE.”



LOCAL INITIATIVE SUPPORT CORPORATION

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Polina Oshero



FORMALIZING AND LEGITIMIZING MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES CREATES ECONOMIC MOBILITY.”

Small businesses and entrepreneurship, along with homeownership, are important avenues for creating wealth. They're also key for building healthy and vibrant communities, especially in underserved, low-income neighborhoods. The Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) works to create job opportunities, increase livability, and support inclusive economic development. Since opening its Indianapolis office in 1992, LISC has invested more than \$319 million in the city.

“We have a robust portfolio of programs to address the needs we've seen in local communities,” says Claudia Mendez-Perkins, LISC's lead program officer for economic development. “We partner with organizations in the neighborhoods we serve and work closely with them to implement initiatives.”

These initiatives benefit local businesses in a number of ways. In place now for more than 25 years, LISC's Façade and Property Improvement Program distributes annual grants to help business owners improve the exterior appearance of their spaces. Meanwhile, the Real Estate Assistance Fund for Black-Owned Businesses provides up to \$40,000 for owners looking to secure commercial properties. LISC also partners with Verizon for the Small Business Digital Ready program, an online educational platform that includes customized courses on topics such as digital marketing, and one-on-one mentoring.

Gaining access to capital and other available resources are common challenges that many business owners of color face.

“THERE ARE RESOURCES OUT THERE, BUT IF PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE OR WHERE TO LOOK, THEY WON'T FIND THEM,”

Mendez-Perkins says, “our 10-month Microenterprise Navigator Program started in 2021 in partnership with the City of Indianapolis to provide technical assistance, business coaching, networking opportunities, and resource navigation. The impact we've seen so far has been tremendous. Business owners that enter the program really go through a complete transformation.”

LISC's latest venture, the Latino Business Support Network, provides resources and exposure for Latino-owned small businesses in Indy through a collaboration with the Lumina Foundation and several Latino-led non-profits, with the goal of strengthening the whole ecosystem.

“People are starting to understand how important it is to support communities of color,” Mendez-Perkins explains. “These businesses exist, but they may not always be visible. Formalizing and legitimizing them creates economic mobility, and also strengthens and showcases our diversity in Indianapolis.”

LISC aims to keep growing its roster of programs with financial support from mission-aligned foundations and corporations. A new pilot program is in the works to develop vacant city lots into urban growing spaces with lease-to-own options for farmers of color. It's another example of LISC's mission to make Indianapolis a more economically inclusive city.

“If you want to start a business here, help is available,” Mendez-Perkins says.



“SOMETIMES, LATER BECOMES NEVER — DO IT NOW.”

CREATING COMMUNITY IN TERRE HAUTE.

LITTLE BEAR COFFEE

MAJA ALIC AUSTIN

01	TERRE HAUTE	City
02	2019	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	LITTLEBEARERREHAUTE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY LAVANYA NARAYANAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Seyi Okeowo

Walk into Terre Haute’s Little Bear Coffee Co., and you immediately feel at home. Grab a daily cup on the way to work or drop in for one of more than 20 craft-made beverages. The “everyone is welcome” vibe is exactly what Maja Alic Austin was going for when she first opened in October of 2019. That’s because Austin’s journey has not been easy. At the age of 9, she and her widowed mother fled their home country of Bosnia for a better life.

Growing up in the U.S., Austin worked as a server in her family’s restaurant in Terre Haute, Delish Cafe. Even though food service was a calling, life took a different path for a while.

“I actually was a teacher first — got my master’s degree and taught for eight years in a Title 1 school that served low-income students,” says Austin. Her son, Eli Barrett Austin, was born in 2016.

“As a teacher, the students were my life — I taught from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. every day,” she says. “It was fulfilling but draining — once my son came along, I realized I had to make a choice, and I chose him.”

The obvious next step? Food service, she says. While flexible work hours were a big draw, the fact that Terre Haute did not have a ‘congregating cafe’ was another. There was a dearth of places in town to simply grab coffee or a bite and hang out.

So Austin and her mother Senka, who she calls her ‘right hand woman,’ jumped into action. In 2019, Little Bear Coffee Co., named fondly after her son’s nickname, welcomed its first customers.

“I never had any formal business training, so everything I knew was simply by watching my parents,” she says. “But I did have one huge source of help — the local Small Business

Association helped us create a website, arrange for professional photos, and provide other support to help us get up and running.”

Since then, Austin opened a second Little Bear Coffee Co. in Rosedale and a third is planned for fall 2023 in South Terre Haute. She inaugurated a mobile coffee cart for local festivals last year and was recently named one of the ‘12 under 40’ in Terre Haute.

“I think it’s the immigrant drive that keeps me going,” Austin says. “I always felt like I had to prove myself to everyone around me, including my family, and that’s what has motivated me.”

Austin’s drive is reflected in Little Bear Coffee Co.’s ever-expanding menu, which offers craft beverages like the Oasis Bear Bomb, Iced Chai Tea, Banana Cream Pie Latte, and her most-recent food innovation, a chicken tikka melt. Now seven years old, her son is a common sight in the cafe, proudly claiming “I’m the Little Bear!” to the customers and community members, who have embraced her business.

“I try to be as involved in the community that I can and help out local initiatives, whether it’s Top Chefs in Terre Haute or the Terre Haute Women’s Club,” says Austin. “We’ve done community events too — philanthropic ‘Dine to Donate’ fundraisers. It’s just me trying to do my little part.”

Little Bear Coffee Co. is a testament to Austin’s perseverance, courage, and go-getter attitude embodied in her entrepreneurial mantra, a popular quote she’s always embraced: “Sometimes, later becomes never — do it now.”

MELI

MORE EQUALITY, LESS IGNORANCE.

FUTURE

“WE’VE BUILT A COMMUNITY THAT CONNECTS PEOPLE AND SPREADS CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS.”

MONTY MATUKA

01	INDIANAPOLIS	City
02	2020	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	MELI-INTL.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY Monty Matuka

Focused on encouraging people to learn more about who they are and about others in order to unite and connect more as a human race, Monty Matuka set out to create a business with the mindset of bringing people together. “Overall, we’re a clothing company,” he says “But we’re trying to encourage and spread that mindset through our campaigns, statements that are designed onto our garments, partnerships, community workshops, and events.”

His fashion brand MELI officially went to market in 2020 after Matuka produced a style show through FAME Foundation, a non-profit that he created. There, he found that the brand really resonated with people, and individuals want to wear clothing that stands for a social cause that they are passionate about. “A lot of times they invest in apparel that doesn’t really stand for what they truly believe in,” he says. “We’ve built a community that connects people and spreads cross-cultural awareness through what individuals wear and do.”

Operating in Indianapolis’ Fountain Square neighborhood, Matuka received his first grant through Be Nimble, Co, followed by a JLH Fund grant, which allowed him to invest in the business’s production and marketing. MELI became the first minority-owned clothing company to officially partner with the Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS) as a licensee and their initiative Race for Equality & Change closely aligns with MELI’s tagline: More Equality, Less Ignorance. His goal is to build more partnerships of this type with other professional sports organizations.

Matuka next wants to create an internship program to help college and high school students who are interested in fashion, but lack opportunities and experiences. He continues hosting workshops through Circle City Storytellers to empower others to connect on a deeper level. “We can lean on each other to continue to build our community and uplift others,” Matuka says.

FIRST MINORITY-OWNED CLOTHING COMPANY TO OFFICIALLY PARTNER WITH IMS

TERRE HAUTE
12 UNDER 40
FOR 2022

MAIN STREET

NEW CASTLE



“THE COVID PANDEMIC BECAME AN IMPETUS FOR US BECAUSE PEOPLE SAW THAT EVERYTHING THEY NEED IS RIGHT HERE IN OUR COMMUNITY”

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

The slow, methodical downturn in New Castle, Indiana occurred when the Chrysler plant closed and the manufacturing exodus left the historic downtown a shell of what it once was. With empty storefronts and boarded-up buildings, a group of residents began putting flower pots in the area to show that someone cared about the community. As the initiative grew, the focus shifted to filling unoccupied spaces with local businesses and encouraging area entrepreneurs.

In 2014, New Castle Main Street was launched and is dedicated to the renewal and revitalization of the downtown district. The hope is to grow the small business community and fill the empty storefronts. Through a partnership with the Henry County Community Foundation, the organization received its first grant and the Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) has been integral in offering workshops for aspiring local entrepreneurs.

Once a vacant building, the group created a pop-up shop where businesspeople can utilize short-term leases to sell their products at low risk. “The COVID pandemic became an impetus for us because people saw that everything they need is right here in our community,” says Executive Director Carrie Barrett. “We thought about how we can help the business acumen of local people by fostering entrepreneurship, removing barriers and offering education.”

Under the Henry County Creates umbrella, the program Business Builders hosts a launch night which awards sub-grants to local business owners. Barrett’s goal for this series is not only to offer money to local entrepreneurs, but also as a way for people to connect. “I hope when someone goes to launch night, there’s another businessperson there from the community where they can get mentoring and expertise,” she says. “That’s more wealth than you can ever get, as opposed to someone just giving you dollars.”



4

BUSINESSES THAT HAVE OPENED IN HENRY COUNTY

“THE ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITY IN INDIANA IS STRONG AND FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES.”

NOVILYTIC

PAUL DREIER

01	WEST LAFAYETTE	City
02	2021	Founded
03	11	Number of employees
04	NOVILYTIC.COM	Web

THE PROTEOMETER ACHIEVES IN 7 MINUTES WHAT PREVIOUS TECHNOLOGY ACHIEVED IN 24 HOURS

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

PAUL DREIER IS SAVING LIVES.

Paul Dreier and Dr. Fred Regnier have built their careers around developing, producing and marketing products that help save lives. Novilytic, the West Lafayette-based company Regnier founded in 2016 and reincorporated in 2021, continues that shared mission. Using analytic nanotechnology, Novilytic's new Proteometer device tests and monitors bioreactors during drug development and manufacturing to ensure product purity.

"The technology that's currently being utilized for this task is 40 years old," Dreier says. "Fred knew there had to be a better way."

The Proteometer achieves in seven minutes what the previous generation of technology achieved in 24 hours, optimizing development and production for pharmaceutical customers, and ultimately getting safe, potentially lifesaving medicines to patients much faster and at lower cost.

"We launched the first version of the product in March 2023, and already have repeat orders coming in," Dreier mentions.

Although hiring staff, securing funding, and finding lab space haven't been problems, Novilytic, like any startup, needed some strategic support. Dreier is quick to

acknowledge entities like the Indiana Economic Development Corporation and Elevate Ventures for their assistance and resources.

"Indiana supports startups better than many other states; we take full advantage of that," he explains. "Our investors receive Venture Capital Investment (VCI) Tax Credits, and we're using the Manufacturing Readiness Grant for automation to put our products together. We also consulted with an Elevate expert on IT issues, and it didn't cost us a penny."

The Indiana Biosciences Research Institute (IBRI) and the Indiana Health Industry Forum have also proven to be valuable partners, and a press release distributed by the Purdue Research Foundation led to media coverage that generated sales leads and investment for Novilytic.

In the long term, Dreier hopes the company will grow to be a major player in Indiana's bio-tech sector, bringing new jobs and recognition to the state.

"Can we become the next Roche Diagnostics or Cook Medical?" he muses. "I don't know, but we are sure going to try."

STITCHED BY ANNA & VIV

“IF I NEED TO ASK A SMALL BUSINESS QUESTION, THEY [SBDC] WILL BE THERE TO HELP ME.”

JASMINE MOORE

01	BRAZIL/TERRE HAUTE	City
02	2022	Founded
03	5	Number of employees
04	STITCHEDBYAV.COM	Web

HAVE GROWN TO OVER 6 FIGURES IN 12 MONTHS

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

NEED EMBROIDERY DONE? JASMINE MOORE CAN DO IT, AND MORE.

Tampa native Jasmine Moore relocated to the state to attend Indiana State University where she met her future husband. The couple settled in his hometown of Brazil, Indiana and after the birth of their first daughter in 2014, she started a small sewing side-business. Eventually adding embroidery to the mix, in 2022 she took her business full-time and Stitched by Anna & Viv – named after her two daughters – now offers Moore's well-known and unique designs that can be found on Etsy.

After seeing a Tik Tok video, she decided to add permanent jewelry to the business through a product line called Ever Haute Co. that she runs out of a Terre Haute location. "We take a chain and custom size it to how someone wants it to fit," she says. "We were the first ones in the Wabash Valley to offer this service, and while it's a trendy product, it also has longevity."

Construction on a tiny house on wheels that travels to area handmade markets was recently completed for the business, and Moore is next launching a custom trucker hat bar. Maintaining the embroidery production at her Brazil facility, she has outgrown her Terre Haute space and will

be temporarily relocating to Haute City Center, which she hopes will help infuse more business back into the mall.

Moore contacted the West Central Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and credits Dave Bittner for guiding her to resources and helping with a branding package for the business. She also received a grant for website development. "For smaller businesses getting started in Indiana, there are some great resources," she says. "I had access to the SBDC, and if I ever feel like I need to ask another small business a question, they will be right there to help me."

SHE. EVENT

CONNECTS BLACK,
WOMEN-OWNED
SMALL BUSINESSES
WITH THE RIGHT
PEOPLE AND TOOLS

WRITTEN BY ALLISON TROUTNER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Seyi Okeowo



WE WILL BRING MORE BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES TO DOWNTOWN INDY, AND NOT ONLY BUSINESSES, BUT WELL-ROUNDED BUSINESSES.”

The idea for SHE.Event came to Katina Washington after a casual conversation sitting among a circle of friends. “I noticed that I was giving them information about running a business they had no idea about,” Washington says.

Washington built her own fashion accessory design and retail business, SHE, through trial and error, so she understands the importance of female entrepreneurs having access to quality support.

“STATISTICS SHOW THAT FEW BLACK BUSINESSES ARE BEING RUN EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY WITHOUT ALL THE RESOURCES THEY NEED LIKE LEGAL COUNSEL, PROFESSIONAL POS SYSTEMS, AND FINANCIAL LITERACY,” SHE SAYS.

In 2017, Washington planned 27 trips around the world as a vendor and student of other successful Black female entrepreneurs. “I brought what I learned from other entrepreneurs back to my community to help their businesses go farther,” Washington says.

Armed with years of entrepreneurial expertise, Washington developed SHE.Event, a non-profit business accelerator that connects Black female entrepreneurs to the resources they need to run sustainable businesses, including access to capital and professional training.

“We provide one-on-one coaching, and most importantly, mental health services ...” Washington explains. “We want a well-rounded entrepreneur.”

SHE.Event helps local businesses level up through distinctive exposure opportunities, including SHE. Xperience Shoppes, a Black-owned department store in Circle Centre Mall in downtown Indianapolis, now in a new location on Delaware Street. SHE.Event also hosts SHE.

Event Indy Annual Ubuntu Celebration, a networking, entertainment, and fashion show event for Black-owned businesses in Indianapolis. In 2022, the event hosted 263 BIPOC entrepreneurs and more than 6,000 guests at the Indiana State Fairgrounds. The event brings together more Black-owned businesses than any other networking event in Indianapolis. Washington says funding and support from The Glick Fund at Central Indiana Community Foundation, Local Initiative Support Corporation, Verizon, and Huntington Bank have been instrumental in the non-profit’s success.

Given Indianapolis’ growing community of Black women entrepreneurs, Washington believes that SHE.Event will help the city become a mogul capital. “We’re breaking barriers,” she says. “We will bring more Black businesses to downtown Indy, and not only businesses, but well-rounded businesses.”

6K+

ATTENDEES
IN 2022

263

BIPOC
ENTREPRENEURS
IN 2022



“
WHEN I LOOK
AT MY GOALS,
IT'S...TO CHANGE
THE WAY BUSINESS
IS DONE.”

THE HIVIZ

LISA HUTSON

01	BATESVILLE	City
02	2022	Founded
03	8	Number of employees
04	THEHIVIZ.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

LISA HUTSON IS EMPOWERING WOMEN IN MANUFACTURING.

Women factory and plant workers traditionally have had to wear improperly fitting attire, and many are still wearing men's style clothing. This is especially problematic for fire resistant (FR) maternity wear. "Women engineers and workers have had to throw on big jumpsuits no matter how hot they were," says Lisa Hutson, owner of the Batesville uniform company The Hiviz. Her company set out to give women in manufacturing more options and make them feel good about their bodies and in their uniforms.

After being a full-time mom, Hutson battled breast cancer and afterwards decided it was time to launch her own business. Setting her sights on the apparel industry, she purchased a Cricut Cutting Machine and began working out of her basement. She officially launched The Hiviz in 2022 as a certified woman-owned business, and while attending a procurement fair, she connected with global food corporation Cargill. Through Cargill's joint venture with Ardent Mills, Hutson landed a three-year contract across all of their forty-five plants in the U.S., Puerto Rico and Canada.

Working closely with Southeast Indiana's Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Hutson discovered state resources and was awarded an Indiana Manufacturing Readiness grant to purchase new equipment.

After relocating to a 7,000 square-foot facility, The Hiviz expanded another 10,000 square feet and plans to build their own cutting and sewing facility in Batesville. Established as a B Corporation, the company meets higher standards for social and environmental issues and advocates that everybody matters - especially within the LGBTQ community - and remains committed to benefitting employee well-being. "We're not only making a difference in the lives of the people we serve, but also with our employees," Hutson says. "When I look at my goals, it's not to be a millionaire, but rather to change the way business is done."

\$1.3M
PROJECTED IN SALES
FOR 2023



THE SYCAMORE WINERY

THE PIGGS HAVE GROWTH PLANS THAT INCLUDE DOUBLING IN SIZE IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS.

DANIEL & SARAH PIGG

01	WEST TERRE HAUTE	City
02	2015	Founded
03	10	Number of employees
04	THESYCAMOREWINERY.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Polina Osherov

DANIEL AND SARAH KNOW LOCAL SUPPORT IS VITAL.

Daniel and Sarah Pigg have been in the wine business recreationally and professionally since they started making wine in their basement in 2009. In 2015, Daniel and Sarah bought the land for the Sycamore Winery. In 2016, they began to build and in 2017, they opened the doors to the winery for the first time—naming it after the mascot of their beloved Indiana State University. Today, Sarah serves as the creative marketing and event half of the business while Daniel serves as the development and financial half.

As a relatively young small business, several resources have been important to the growth of the Sycamore Winery — the first of which is the West Central Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Indiana State University. ISU is both Sarah and Daniel's alma mater and it's the place where Daniel was initially exposed to the startup entrepreneurial world. The SBDC at ISU helped Daniel develop additional relationships and the know-how of the entrepreneurial world before he and Sarah launched the winery business.

In addition to the ISU small business development center, Riddell National Bank was a key partner in making the winery a reality. When

Daniel and Sarah first set out to buy the land, they connected with three banks in the hopes that they could secure a loan. After being denied by two of those lenders, Daniel sought out Riddell National Bank, did research on USDA loans and was immediately able to secure a loan for the Sycamore Winery.

Other major business resources for the Piggs have been both their reliable network of advisors and the local Terre Haute community members. Part of that community has been the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce. From advice to network development, the Chamber has been a helping hand to the Sycamore Winery. The local Terre Haute community has also been the bedrock of support for the Sycamore Winery. When COVID-19 hit and the winery needed to pivot, it was the community that supported their wine slushie pivot strategy.

The local and state business support has allowed the winery to grow exponentially and reach new markets. With this continued support, the Piggs have growth plans that include doubling in size in the next 3 years.

Today, the community still supports the winery's events and sees them as a family-friendly and community-oriented local business.

26K
ANNUAL VISITORS



TRULY TEAS



PUSH YOURSELF INTO UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS.”

WRITTEN BY LAVANYA NARAYANAN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

“Tea? Oh, tea has been in my life since I was a little girl!” The answer comes naturally to Lindsey Liesenfelt who, it seems, couldn’t imagine a life without tea. Part of it is sentiment — a special memory between her, her brother, and her single mom, a secret shared between them on her childhood home’s veranda on Friday night game nights.

“We’d pick up food from the grocery store, and then came the part I most looked forward to: hitting the tea aisle. We’d pick our favorites, and they’d be our post-dinner treat,” she smiles.

Luckily for her— the popular Teavana had been bought out by Starbucks, and Crown Point, Indiana was in dire need of a place that satisfied Lindsey’s major craving: looseleaf tea. It was a no-brainer, and Truly Teas was born.

A business born out of passion, Lindsay spent years as an HR Manager before taking the plunge and becoming a full time business owner. A journey that was extremely self-taught, she credits marketing classes, especially taught by marketing professor Dr. Yilka Azemi, and resources at the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) in Northwest Indiana for growing the business to its current, incomparable presence.

Now in Cedar Lake, Lindsey is known as the ‘mobile tea lady’ and sells her teas mostly online, with appearances at local farmers’ markets and select retailers in Northwest

Indiana. But after growing her business, Lindsey’s goal is to now give back to the community that has given her so, so much.

“During COVID, I donated tea to local cafes with stop-and-shops, as well as people in need — it was the least I could do,” she says.

Recently, she’s even partnered with Tim Fealy’s Hometown Happenings to create a Mango Peach tea that, with each sale, gives back to a local charity. And when she isn’t busy selling tea, she’s sharing her experiences with the students of IU Northwest and supporting other small businesses in the area, such as Cafe Fresco and 2 Old Goats antique shop, where her tea bags are served and sold.

“It’s been quite the journey, I can say, but it’s required a lot of pushing — that’s my advice, always. Push yourself into uncomfortable situations. Do your research. Find your niche. Network. And, last but not least, get involved in the small business culture — become a part of the community, and it will embrace you with open arms.”



LINDSEY LIESENFELT

01	CEDAR LAKE	City
02	2018	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	TRULYTEAS.COM	Web

MILESTONE 04

ESTABLISHED

“ THESE STUDENTS... HAVE AWESOME IDEAS TO HELP IMPROVE THINGS LIKE OUR OPERATIONS AND AUTOMATION.”

ANTIQUE CANDLE CO.

BRITTANY WHITENACK

01	LAFAYETTE	City
02	2014	Founded
03	30	Number of employees
04	ANTIQUECANDLECO.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Seyi Okeowo

BRITTANY WHITENACK CARES ABOUT QUALITY.

Brittany Whitenack was 23 years old when she quit a draining job and purchased a \$200 candle-making kit. Nearly ten years later, the company that she started in her Lafayette, Indiana kitchen has grown to \$8 million in annual revenue that employs between 35 to 40 full-time workers (a.k.a. “the candle crew.”)

“It started as a hobby, where I was in my home for the first couple years, hauling candles to and from farmers’ markets, craft fairs, and vintage markets,” she says. “I think my first year in business I did about \$16,000 in revenue, which is wild because now we do that in a single day.”

Initially purchasing Ball jars and coffee tins from antique stores to serve as receptacles for the products, Whitenack dubbed her company Antique Candle Co. — and each jar still has a galvanized lid to give the products a fun vintage flair. Using only cleaner burning, longer lasting soy wax, Whitenack and her team continue to innovate new fragrances and develop products such as multi-wick and wood-wick candles. Sold primarily online and direct-to-consumer, Antique Candle Co. also partners with about 650 brick-and-mortar

stores across the U.S. and Canada that carry their products.

As her business evolved, programs offered through the MatchBOX Coworking Studio in downtown Lafayette helped Whitenack engage with local business owners. In 2022, a turning point was a \$200,000 Manufacturing Readiness Grant Whitenack used for a digital plant initiative: centralizing data gathering and deploying cloud-based analytics to self-optimize the candle manufacturing process.

Whitenack notes that proximity to Purdue University has been vital in aiding the company’s success. “What I like about Indiana, particularly being next to Purdue, is we get to work with an amazing part-time workforce,” she says. “These students who are future engineers, teachers, and data scientists are hired for candle making, but then they have awesome ideas to help improve things like our operations and automation.”

\$8M
IN ANNUAL
REVENUE

“ WE DON’T JUST TEACH DANCE, WE TEACH LIFE.”

BRI’S DANCE PLACE

BRIANNA HAIRLSON

01	MERRILLVILLE	City
02	2018	Founded
03	10	Number of employees
04	BRISDANCEPLACE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

BRIANNA HAIRLSON IS MAKING DANCE ACCESSIBLE.

Brianna Hairlson began dancing at age seven and always imagined one day owning her own studio. After graduating with a degree in business and minor in dance from Howard University in Washington D.C., Hairlson worked as an IBM consultant while volunteering her dance expertise to the community on the side. She enrolled in an entrepreneurship accelerator program, not knowing that only a few months later, she would be laid off from her consultant job.

“It just fell into place and I went into full-time entrepreneurship mode,” she says. “I was already testing dance classes for pregnant women and new moms, so I opened my business on June 15, 2018 inside a church gym.”

Utilizing resources offered through the Northwest Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Hairlson created the LLC for Bri’s Dance Place and eventually relocated the studio to a 3,800-square-foot facility in Merrillville. Today, she has a teaching staff of ten and 100+ students enrolled in the various classes offered, from musical theatre training, to boys-only classes.

With classes for tots as young as two, and the belief that dance is for all abilities and

stages, Hairlson’s goal is not only to teach dance, but also to instill life skills. Hairlson hopes to work within juvenile detention centers and provide grief workshops as a way to offer dance as therapy and as a way to heal from trauma. “We don’t just teach dance, we teach life!” is her bold website headline.

Due to increasing demand driven by an expanding portfolio of classes, Hairlson intends to hire additional staff, and with more driven dancers enrolled at the studio, wants to grow the competitive travel team. The next goal will be relocating to an even larger space that can accommodate the studio’s mushrooming number of dance families.

“I started in the church gym, then was able to rent a dance studio,” she says. “We’re booming and I want to expand into at least a 10,000-square-foot facility.”

14%
GROWTH YEAR-
OVER-YEAR

CENTURY AND HALF CENTURY BUSINESS AWARDS

BUSINESSES DON'T JUST SURVIVE IN INDIANA, THEY THRIVE.

WRITTEN BY CECE ANDREWS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Brandon Wright*

The Governor's Century and Half Century Business Awards program honors the resilience of businesses that have found their roots in Indiana. Whether they've served for a half century or stood the test of time for a century or more, these businesses are celebrated for their unwavering dedication to enhancing their local communities.

The ceremony was held on August 9, 2023 at the Indiana Statehouse and recognized award winners from 2020 to 2023. More than 1,200 Indiana companies have been recognized over 32 years since the program's inception.

Christopher Overmyer, CEO of Fratco Inc., proudly represents the fifth generation steering the family's manufacturing legacy. As Fratco marks a century of operation in White County, its journey was honored with the Century Award by Governor Holcomb. The secret to their success, according to Overmyer, is a people-first approach. "What I learned from my grandad and dad was really, no matter what you do or what you make, you are in the people business," he says. "You take care of your employees and customers and everything else follows. That's how you win the long game."

Another featured honoree, Kropfe Industries Inc., was recognized with a Half Century Award. "My great grandpa started the business in 1946," Trevor Kropfe says. "I'm now fourth generation in the business. We have survived and thrived for the past 77 years." Elkhart County is known as the "RV capitol of the world," and Kropfe has all the resources necessary to continue expanding their travel trailer and camper manufacturing business. "Our long-term goal is to build another facility, keep it in Indiana and further grow the business," he says.

As for Fratco Inc, Overmyer's aim is to pass on the tradition and knowledge to his two sons. "We are always on the lookout for opportunities to expand. My 20-year-old son is already working with us full-time," he says. "I also have a younger son who is a high school senior, and he will be joining us as well. For us, it's always about family, people, and honor."

Kropf Industries and Fratco Inc are just two of many Indiana-based businesses that are preserving traditions and nurturing family legacies. As they continue to grow and pass their knowledge to the next generations, these companies symbolize the enduring spirit and values of Indiana.

MY GREAT GRANDPA STARTED THE BUSINESS IN 1946. I'M NOW FOURTH GENERATION IN THE BUSINESS. WE HAVE SURVIVED AND THRIVED FOR THE PAST 77 YEARS."

Kropfe Industries Inc.



“ WE CAN DO IT ALL JUST LIKE THE DEALER CAN, BUT WE’RE MORE COST EFFECTIVE.”

ELITE AUTO

JEROMY BROWN

01	SPENCER	City
02	2019	Founded
03	5	Number of employees
04	ELITEAUTOSPENCER.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

ELITE AUTO CAN DO ANY JOB.

Jeromy Brown took the \$500 from his final paycheck as an auto dealership repairman to buy parts and work independently on his first customer’s car. He continued to reinvest what he earned on each repair job to build a client base, and in 2019 opened Elite Auto, a full-service automotive repair shop in Spencer, Indiana. “We do everything from oil changes all the way up to engine and transmission repairs,” he says. “Our shop is for someone who’s looking for dealership quality and skilled technicians who are current on their training, but without the dealership price.”

Bridging the gap between dealerships and the small independents, customers rely on Elite Auto for quality repairs. While most independently-owned shops focus on easy maintenance, they avoid complex issues. Elite Auto technicians have the trained skillsets and equipment for challenging repairs, but will also complete routine upkeep. “When they have a huge problem, we offer an alternative from having to go to the dealership and pay the big rates,” Brown says. “That’s kind of our niche - we can do it all just like the dealer can, but we’re more cost effective.”

Elite Auto currently employs five skilled technicians, and averages about 350 customers per month. Their clients also include county and government entities, where they work on vehicles such as fire trucks and EMS vans.

Brown is next hoping to expand his business by opening a second location in Monroe County. “We’re already drawing customers in all the way from Monroe to Owen County, including working on fleet vehicles,” he says. “Adding a second location in that area will be even more beneficial to the business.”

350

CUSTOMERS PER MONTH

GREEN SIGN

KNOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

“ SUSTAINABILITY EQUALS LONGEVITY, AND THERE ARE MANY FUTURE BRANDS FOR GREEN SIGN COMPANY TO BOOST WITH THE PERFECT SIGN.”

SHAWN GREEN

01	GREENSBURG	City
02	1971	Founded
03	20	Number of employees
04	GREENSIGNCO.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY NATALIE JAMES

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Among the many milestones along an entrepreneur’s journey, perhaps none is as emotional as the day the brand is revealed. Shawn Green and Green Sign Company have facilitated many such milestones, serving anyone in need of a sign since Billy Green started the Greensburg, Indiana business in 1971, hand-painting every sign. When Billy passed, his son Shawn made it his life’s work to continue his parent’s legacy of helping communities thrive through authentic branding.

After taking the helm while still just a teenager, Shawn began exploring innovations in the sign business. Over time, after connecting with other industry professionals and local groups such as the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs, Green realized that the company’s fate rested on its ability to transition from hand-painted to technology-based signage.

Today, nearly 100% of the company’s signs are tech-driven, with electronic messaging systems chief among them. Also available are vehicle wraps, awnings, murals, illuminated display cases, and much more, thanks to

Green’s employee team of 20 designers, fabricators, and installers. Green credits the Decatur County, Shelbyville, and Columbus Chambers of Commerce for helping Green Sign Company connect with and serve customers nearby and nationwide.

Though the company exists to sell signs, Green understands that the underlying purpose is to support businesses in their quests to stand out and engage customers. Green Sign Company has won multiple regional and national awards for their service to the community, whether it’s a donated banner for a charity bike ride, or a pink fire truck wrap in the name of breast cancer awareness.

Today, the main goal for Green Sign Company, Green says, is to maintain steady growth at a sustainable pace. Sustainability equals longevity, and there are many future brands for Green Sign Company to boost with the perfect sign.

50+

YEARS IN OPERATION

“

YOU'RE GOING TO HIT BUMPS IN THE ROAD. LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES AND KEEP MOVING FORWARD.”

GRESHAM FOODS

BRYAN & DOUG GRESHAM

01	SEYMOUR	City
02	2000	Founded
03	3	Number of employees
04	GRESHAMFOODS.COM	Web

SWEET D'S ORIGINAL BBQ SAUCE AVAILABLE AT WALMART AND KROGER STORES NATIONWIDE.

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Brandon Wright

DON'T GIVE UP!

For Bryan and Doug Gresham, the taste of success is sweet. And maybe a little spicy. The barbecue sauce recipe their mother Dee Dee created on her stovetop in Seymour back in the 1980s proved so popular, friends and family began asking for it by the bottle.

“She and my dad started a food stand to sell it as a hobby,” Bryan recalls. “My brother and I have since been able to turn it into a business, learning as we went along.”

The Greshams sold their all-natural, gluten-free Sweet D's Original BBQ Sauce through small convenience shops, and via in-store demos and events until the mid-1990s when a major retailer came calling.

“Walmart was starting a program to invest billions of dollars into American-made products,” Bryan recalls. “They invited us to Bentonville, where we cooked a meal for the buyers.”

Buyers who, as it turned out, liked what they tasted. Within a year, Sweet D's was hitting the shelves, and is now available at Walmarts and Kroger stores across the country.

Trevor Lane and Mike Fulkerson with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation stepped up with support for the company early on, connecting the Greshams with David Coates at the Indiana State Department of Agriculture.

“Those three guys have been our most valuable resources,” says Doug. “They’ve done a great job of trying to understand our goals, and we know that we can shoot them an email or give them a call anytime and they’ll go out of their way to help us.”

Although their company is thriving, the Gresham brothers aren't slowing down. They're aiming to grow Sweet D's into a top national brand, and follow in its footsteps with a new seasoning blend.

Says Bryan: “We’re very proud of what we’ve done, but we’ve got a long way to go and a lot of things we still want to do.”

GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP CONGRESS MELBOURNE 2023

A WORLDWIDE HOOSIER WELCOME

Indiana will host the Global Entrepreneurship Congress (GEC) for the first time in 2025, welcoming entrepreneurs, policymakers, investors, and startup ecosystem builders from around the world to Indiana and its capital city.

Indianapolis will be the second U.S. location to host the annual convention since its inaugural event in 2009. The Global Entrepreneurship Congress is hosted in a different entrepreneurial city each year.

“Indiana has a strong and storied history with entrepreneurship at the center, and we are thrilled to showcase our state and our innovative ecosystem during the Global Entrepreneurship Congress in 2025,” said Governor Eric J. Holcomb.

“With the help of Hoosier entrepreneurs, Indiana’s economy is thriving – pushing forward new innovations, attracting top talent, and creating countless opportunities for current and future residents to prosper. Hosting this global convention is a testament to our state’s commitment, past and future, to cultivating a vibrant ecosystem that supports dreamers, innovators, entrepreneurs and thought leaders.”

The Indiana Economic Development team traveled to Melbourne, Australia in September 2023 to preview the 2025 event that will take place on June 1-5, 2025 at Indiana Convention Center. GEC Indiana will serve as a unique opportunity for Hoosier founders and entrepreneurs to connect with global resources, while providing a platform to showcase Indiana innovation.

“ IT'S NOT THE MILES PER HOUR. IT'S THE SMILES PER HOUR.”

JANUS MOTORCYCLES



RICHARD WORSHAM

01	GOSHEN	City
02	2011	Founded
03	18	Number of employees
04	JANUSMOTORCYCLES.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Adam Raschka

CELEBRATE THE JOURNEY, NOT THE DESTINATION.

Bigger isn't always better. By scaling back CCs, or cubic centimeters, on its small-displacement bikes, Goshen-based Janus Motorcycles offers a nostalgic customer experience on a custom-crafted bike. Owner Richard Worsham likens it to a leisurely “rambling” ride, versus a deafening power ride.

“Motorcycle riding isn't just for daredevils and Harley guys,” Worsham points out. “For our clients, it's about the shared adventure and the journey.”

The idea for the business emerged as Worsham worked with Janus co-founder Devin Biek over several summers, restoring and repairing vintage European mopeds while earning his architecture degree at nearby Notre Dame. Inspired by the vehicles they serviced, the duo decided to build one from scratch for themselves. Worsham drafted the plans for the classically styled model as we now know it today, and Biek put it all together. They officially launched Janus Motorcycles with private funding in 2011, naming their venture after a two-faced Roman god who represents the duality of past and future.

“We quickly realized the depth of resources that were available to us through Elkhart County's nationally recognized RV industry and the regional Amish community,” Worsham recalls.

Janus still partners with a network of skilled Amish craftsmen to produce chassis, fuel tanks, and other parts for the 300 or so motorcycles the company sells each year. However, it is bringing some of the work in-house to its own fabrication shop to streamline operations and increase production capacity.

“We've enjoyed around 20% growth year-over-year since we've been in business,” Worsham mentions.

Worsham is capitalizing on the company's unique market niche, with Janus producing several lines of easy-to-ride retro motorcycles using tested templates that offer lots of opportunity for customization.

“We're excited to continue our journey and build personal connections with our customers,” Worsham says. “It's our hope that Janus will keep growing steadily in the years to come.”

“ WE ARE VERY THANKFUL THAT WE ARE ABLE TO BE IN THIS COMMUNITY.”



LINCKS CLOTHING

RITA & RICK LINCK

01	SALEM	City
02	2006	Founded
03	8	Number of employees
04	@LINCKSCLOTHING	Social

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

RITA AND RICK LINCK ARE OUTFITTING THEIR COMMUNITY.

Rita and Rick Lincks began their entrepreneurial journey in 2006, opening Lincks Clothing in a leased space in a shopping center mall. Initially focused on men's apparel, they relocated to the downtown square in Salem, Indiana — shifting and broadening the focus to women's clothing, shoes, and accessories, along with sporting goods, tuxedo rental, and custom screen printing and embroidery. Now with eight employees, the couple continues to expand their offerings and services and has seen sales triple since moving to the new location.

Heavily focused on friendly customer service, the Lincks see the store not only as their economic livelihood, but as a vehicle for good citizenship. They often assist with local fundraisers and answer the call for help in times of crisis. “We live in a very close-knit community,” Rita says. “I never thought that we would be doing the kind of sales that we're doing out of this location, and it allows us to give back to the community in many ways.”

Sports fans rely on Lincks Clothing to make

the spirit wear for all the local schools. So whenever any team competes in a championship game, Rita and Rick are in the store late at night making shirts in preparation for the players' return to town. They will then pass out shirts at the school or sell them to help raise money for the team.

The Lincks see benevolent cheerleading as a form of repayment for the Salem community's thorough embrace of the store. “We are very thankful that we are able to be in this community and that our community supports us,” Rita says. “Without that, we would not be where we are today or to be able to do what we do.”

20% GROWTH YEAR-OVER-YEAR

3X SALES SINCE MOVING TO NEW LOCATION

“
BEING FAMILY-ORIENTED MAKES LIFE A LOT EASIER.”

MOMAX MARBLE & GRANITE

HECTOR CORNEJO

01	MERRILLVILLE & LAFAYETTE	City
02	1996	Founded
03	50	Number of employees
04	MOMAXMARBLE.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

CRAFTING EXCEPTIONAL, ENDURING SURFACES THAT ELEVATE SPACES.

Hector Cornejo worked for a marble and granite company on the north side of Chicago until he grew frustrated by the traffic and daily commute into the city. In 1996, he opted to open his own company, Momax Marble & Granite, Inc., in Merrillville, Indiana which is a full-service, commercial and residential kitchen and bathroom design center. Boasting around \$8 million in annual sales, Momax now employs about fifty people between their original Northwest Indiana site and a second Lafayette location.

With the durability of granite and quartz countertops lasting longer and providing more elegance in home design, the Momax team custom builds their products for every individual project. “We go out and measure kitchens, fireplaces, etc.” Cornejo says. “Whatever an architect can design, we can build.” Initially working directly with the end consumers, builders and contractors, the business has since launched a wholesale component where area stores buy their items and then resell them to the public.

Some public projects showcasing Momax’s designs include local libraries, and the waterfalls located outside Indiana University Northwest’s cafeteria area. “That was a good-sized project and it was challenging,” Cornejo says, “But in the end, it turned out beautiful, everyone was happy and what we completed was exactly what they had envisioned.”

Moving forward, Momax is in the process of acquiring more equipment for the business and purchased one new machine in 2023, with the hopes of acquiring a second piece next year to allow for more computer automation. A family-owned business, Hector works alongside his wife, son and daughter. “Being family-oriented makes life a lot easier,” he says. “Yes, they put in the hours like I do, but it’s their business too. In the end, they’re going to do the hard work and the rewards will come to them.”

\$8M

IN ANNUAL SALES
FOR THE PAST
3 YEARS

JOHNNY GOODE
IS CONTINUING
A LEGACY.

MSP MANUFACTURING

JOHNNY GOODE

01	BLOOMINGTON	City
02	1943	Founded
03	29	Number of employees
04	MSP-MANUFACTURING.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY ALLISON TROUTNER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

For eighty years, MSP Manufacturing has designed and manufactured products for the avionics, aerospace, and military defense industries. Johnny Goode’s father purchased the Bloomington-based company in 2002 and steadily grew revenue by 1,000%. Then COVID severely disrupted America’s supply chains and the aviation business, leading to tough times for MSP Manufacturing. Goode, who served as vice president before being named president in 2023, knew the company needed to diversify and leverage the latest technological innovations to maintain its market position as the premier manufacturer of precision-machined products.

“It’s been rewarding to watch MSP grow over the last two decades and preserve its legacy for quality and excellence,” says Goode. “We owe so much of our success not only to our employees but to our community members as well. We are proud of our 80 years of success and can’t wait to see how we continue to fulfill our mission for the next 80 years.”

Since 1943, MSP Manufacturing (formerly MSP Aviation) has designed and manufactured precision-machined products such as metalcases, boxes, bezels, latches, and other custom components. Customers include Boeing, Curtiss-Wright, Bell Helicopter, Cessna, Gulfstream, and Honeywell. Almost every commercial, corporate, cargo, and military aircraft includes MSP Manufacturing parts.

In 2022, the company was awarded a Manufacturing Readiness Grant from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), in partnership with Conexus Indiana, which funded half the cost of a new 5-axis machine with an automated pallet pool, enabling MSP to do more complex machining in less time. “These machines give us capabilities and capacity we never had before,” Goode says.

MSP Manufacturing also received grants from the Indiana Defense Industrial Base Capability Accelerator Program (IDCAP) and Indiana Technical Assistance Program (INTAP), which they used for employee training programs. “It’s great to have new technology, but if you don’t have the skill set to run it, you’re out of luck,” Goode says.

Goode also works with high schools to create a pipeline of qualified programmers for manufacturing companies like his. By helping people in the community advance their skills, he hopes they will be able to access better jobs and improve their livelihoods. “The passion that drives me to move this company forward is being able to provide a better lifestyle for my family and my employees’ families,” he says.

“
WE OWE SO MUCH OF OUR SUCCESS NOT ONLY TO OUR EMPLOYEES BUT TO OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS WELL.”

100%

SALES GROWTH
OVER PAST TWO
YEARS

WRITTEN BY RYAN MILLBERN

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

NEARSPACE EDUCATION

IS INSPIRING STUDENTS
TO SHOOT FOR THE STARS



WE HOPE TO GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY...INVESTING IN THE CITY OF UPLAND AND PROVIDING STABLE JOBS.”

In downtown Upland, Indiana — population 3,700 — is a company responsible for launching 800 systems and satellites into orbit over the last eight years. NearSpace Launch (NSL), founded in 2014 by Hank Voss, Ph.D. and Jeff Daley, has served clients ranging from NASA to the Department of Defense to Colorado University, building satellites as small as bread loaves that can transmit data from low earth orbit.

NSL started on the campus of Taylor University, where Voss and Daley were colleagues. Launched from the academic realm, NSL's mission naturally includes supporting the education of a new generation of researchers and space scientists.

So it's logical that in 2020, NSL launched NearSpace Education (NSE), a 501(c)(3) dedicated to providing schools and organizations with out-of-this-world (pun intended), project-based learning experiences at an affordable cost.

In three years, NSE has served more than 100 schools, helping educators and students launch over 60 satellite constellations and 450 balloons, many equipped with camera pods and other data-gathering instruments.

“THESE EXPERIENCES INSPIRE STUDENTS AND HELP THEM BUILD CONFIDENCE ACROSS DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES THAT EXTEND BEYOND SPACE AND AEROSPACE,”

said Matthew Voss, chief operations officer for NSL. “These students are getting to use some of the most cutting-edge technology available right now.”

In 2023, NSE announced the construction of a new STEM park in an empty lot just west of the NSL HQ in downtown Upland. “The STEM park has three main purposes,” said Brandon Pearson, director of NSE. “To provide students with opportunities to enhance their STEM skills, to be a

gathering spot for the community, and to enhance downtown Upland.” The park will include a mini amphitheater, learning center, and an outdoor gathering space, with water features and native plant landscaping.

NSE's meteoric rise (another pun intended) and the construction of the STEM park were made possible in part by the resources gleaned from Indiana's dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem. NSE received grants from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority, and Elevate Ventures — as well as contributions from over 80% of the businesses in downtown Upland — to bring the STEM park vision to life.

“It's pleasant to see how receptive people have been to the work we're doing,” Matt Voss says. “We hope to give back to the community as much as we can, investing in the city of Upland and providing stable jobs that will allow for other businesses to thrive.”

100+

SCHOOLS SERVED

COMMUNITY
FOCUSED
STEM PARK

ANNOUNCED
IN 2023

“ INDIANA DOES A LOT TO SUPPORT SMALL INSTRUMENT MAKERS.”

REES HARPS



WILLIAM & PAMELA REES

- 01 **RISING SUN** City
- 02 **1972** Founded
- 03 **15** Number of employees
- 04 **REESHARPS.COM** Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

REES HARPS MAKES HARPS FOR EXPERIENCED PLAYERS AND NEWCOMERS ALIKE.

William Rees started making stringed instruments, including his first harp, in his hometown of Fresno, California in 1972. Starting as a side business in the garage, by 1995 his work was lucrative enough to make it his full-time profession. Now in business for over fifty years, this family-owned company in Rising Sun, Indiana sells their harps in over eighty-three countries around the world.

In 2000, William and his wife Pamela wanted to grow the company and following some meetings with financial advisors, determined they needed to relocate to a different state. After researching business environments across the country, they settled on Indiana. “This is a very business-forward state,” Pamela says. “States like Indiana have figured out that in order to acquire more big businesses, you have to grow the small and medium-sized businesses.”

While continuing to carry their concert harps, in 2003 Rees introduced their Harpsicle Harps which have become their biggest sellers, and players can be found across the world. With the initiative to change how people think of harp

playing, these versions are simpler for beginners and can be easily carried and played anywhere.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Rees purchased a machine for Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) technology and contacted Purdue University for assistance. “If you’re connected to Purdue as a manufacturer, they have people with the right skillsets to help small businesses optimize their manufacturing processes,” she says. In addition, Purdue professor Mark French who has deep roots as a luthier (someone who works on stringed instruments), has deployed his students to assist the business. “Indiana does a lot to support small instrument makers,” she says. “With the rise of the maker economy, cities are doing a lot more in creating maker spaces and that’s helpful for young luthiers, of which there are many in this state.”

300
HARPSICLES SOLD EACH MONTH

PHOTON AUTOMATION

BILL HUFFMAN IS CUTTING EDGE.



“ I’VE REALLY BEEN IMPRESSED WITH THE WORK ETHIC I SEE IN INDIANA.”

BILL HUFFMAN

- 01 **GREENFIELD** City
- 02 **2000** Founded
- 03 **65** Number of employees
- 04 **PHOTONAUTOMATION.COM** Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH
PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

Cutting-edge industrial laser technology has helped to define Photon Automation as a leading provider of custom machinery since the company’s founding in 2000. From its multi-purpose 250,000-square-foot Greenfield facility, the company delivers manufacturing solutions for customers in a variety of industries including pharmaceutical, automotive, aerospace and energy storage.

“When we started the company, our mission was to build high-performance automated machines,” says Bill Huffman, CEO. “Our expertise back then not only included robotics, vision systems, and other typical automation components, but also placed a strong emphasis on industrial lasers.”

Industrial lasers are used to cut, retexturize or weld metals, measure part dimensions, and mark tracking codes. With two laser application labs staffed by physicists and engineers, along with state-of-the-art lasers and its own CT scanner, Photon is well equipped to conduct experiments and test out processes on site.

“Customers are able to see how we solve a problem...then they can buy a machine to do exactly what we just did,” Huffman explains.

Despite supply chain issues and other challenges, Photon has expanded exponentially by taking a “step-function-growth” approach, generating profit to continue upgrading its

equipment and expanding its footprint (the opening of a satellite lab location in Michigan is currently in the works).

The company received a Manufacturing Readiness Grant in 2022 from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), and Huffman says that resources and contacts provided by the City of Greenfield and the Hancock Economic Development Council have played a major role in Photon’s success.

“Our Indiana business community is an ecosystem that promotes collaboration and connection,” he raves. “Every time we have conversations with these organizations, I know we’re being supported. And the talent pool here is so rich, it’s like striking gold.”

The company’s growth is exciting, but more than that, Huffman wants to keep pushing the envelope of technology, create a positive work atmosphere, and make products that exceed customers’ expectations while being simple to use — with an eye on the horizon.

“By focusing on energy storage and e-mobility, we’re looking to become even more relevant in the future,” he says.

250,000
SQ FOOT FACILITY



“
WHATEVER YOU
GIVE, IT ALWAYS
COMES BACK MUCH
BIGGER.”

PINK TEAM

ALEJANDRA MALO

- 01 LAFAYETTE City
- 02 2011 Founded
- 03 70 Number of employees
- 04 TOTALLYPINK.COM Web

WRITTEN BY TERRI PROCOPIO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

ALEJANDRA MALO IS SUPPORTING WOMEN.

Alejandra Malo was born into a Mexican family of entrepreneurs. Kicking off her career in accounting and finance and eventually relocating to Lafayette, Indiana, she began cleaning houses gratis for women who were undergoing cancer treatment. While trying to decide if she wanted to continue the business or become a full-time mom, her mom encouraged her to continue advancing on all fronts. In 2013, she acquired her first factory client, re-oriented the business from residential to commercial, and started Pink Team Cleaning Services which now boasts 70 employees.

The COVID pandemic created more opportunities for Pink Team Cleaning Services as factories increased their cleaning needs. Clients contact her when they start seeing issues with their existing cleaning routines. “After we do a big cleaning, employees are immediately happier and companies see a difference,” she says. “Everybody feels better, and you feel loved when you arrive at your workplace and it has been cleaned.”

Malo, who speaks four languages fluently, has since opened locations in Texas, Georgia, Illinois, and Mexico and on average sees 20% growth in her business each year. She is involved in the Indianapolis Entrepreneurs’ Organization and the Lafayette Association of Women Business Owners. In 2021 and 2022, a Lafayette-based manufacturer Wabash awarded Pink Team Cleaning Services an Outstanding Suppliers Award. Out of 4,600 suppliers, only 24 received this honor.

The company continues to clean homes at no charge for women struggling with cancer, and last year Malo started the non-profit Pink Foundation to help improve the lives of orphaned children. This year, the foundation fundraiser’s proceeds will be sent to a house in Mexico and she hopes to do similar youth-focused giving programs in Lafayette. “If I hadn’t cleaned for women with cancer, Pink Team Cleaning Services wouldn’t exist,” she says, “Whatever you give, it always comes back to you much bigger.”

20%
GROWTH YOY

SWANK & CO.

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Seyi Okeowo

LEARNING NEVER STOPS.

By designing and hosting professional web sites, Hannah Swank has found success through helping other companies thrive. Incorporated in 2018, her namesake design services company offers turn-key website creation and maintenance in addition to managing brand development and designing logos and marketing collateral for businesses of all sizes.

“When I began doing this work ten years ago, I was seeing a lot of people who were struggling to find the time, energy or know-how to build and manage their own web sites,” she recalls. “That’s where we step in.”

Although Swank and her staff rely heavily on word-of-mouth referrals, they’ve also found great value through relationships with the Indiana Small Business Development Center, chamber of commerce, and tourism bureau in their hometown of Vincennes. Swank also credits the Pantheon — Knox County’s unique historic theatre-turned-innovation incubator — for providing coworking space, workshops, mentorship opportunities, and other helpful resources.

“Getting active in the community and being seen has helped our business grow,” she attests. “Especially in our region, but across Indiana in general, I feel there’s a big push to help entrepreneurs get up and running. One of our new employees is a salesperson; she’s focused on making new connections and getting the word out about how we can help people.”

Looking to the future, Swank would like to increase her staff strategically to 5 or 6 employees while still preserving enough time to maintain a u-pick flower farm on her home property and continue homeschooling her kids.

“I want Swank & Co. to remain a small, close-knit team,” she says. “I’d like to be able to grow the company a little bit more, and then sustain it at that level.”

HANNAH SWANK

- 01 VINCENNES City
- 02 2018 Founded
- 03 3 Number of employees
- 04 SWANK-CO.COM Web

“
COLLABORATION
AND NETWORKING
ARE THE KEYS TO
SUCCESS.”

“FOR EVERYTHING WE’VE EVER NEEDED, INDIANA HAS STEPPED UP.”



TIPTON MILLS

DAVID HARDING

01	COLUMBUS	City
02	2015	Founded
03	75	Number of employees
04	TIPTONMILLS.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Jennifer Wilson-Bibbs

YOU CAN ACHIEVE ANYTHING WITH GOOD PEOPLE.

Tipton Mills Foods doesn't just feed customers, it also nourishes a culture of respect.

"We always try to show our employees just how important they are to the business," says co-owner David Harding.

At its 90,000-square-foot Columbus plant, Tipton Mills has been producing and packaging organic, gluten-free nutritional and indulgence powders such as sports drinks, toddler formulas, and cocoa mixes for global brands since 2015. Harding credits organizations like the IEDC and the Department of Workforce Development with providing the company resources it needs to thrive — for example, helping position Tipton Mills as a prospective government contractor.

"I believe Indiana really wants to support manufacturing," Harding explains. "The state has been very generous to us, and I feel like we've only scratched the surface of opportunities that are available."

In recent years, the Tipton Mills leadership team has focused on bridging a language barrier with Hispanic employees that make up a quarter of the company's workforce by taking the

initiative to learn Spanish themselves. They then secured a grant for English as a Second Language tutoring for workers through the McDowell Education Center.

"Your company culture all boils down to treating people well," Harding maintains. "We solve problems for our clients so they can get safe, quality products to their customers, and we need a good workforce in place to do that," Harding describes. "We support them. They support us."

In that spirit, Harding and Tipton Mills co-founder Dave Snyder are eyeing an exciting plan: "It's our hope to eventually be able to make all our employees owners of the company," Harding says. "We exist to provide a place where our people can earn a fair living. It benefits them, it benefits us, and it benefits our entire community."

90,000
SQ FOOT FACILITY

TRIDENT SYSTEMS

RUPAL THANAWALA IS PROBLEM-SOLVING.



“I WANT TO SHOW OTHERS WHAT IS POSSIBLE. IF I CAN DO IT, YOU CAN DO IT.”

RUPAL THANAWALA

01	FISHERS	City
02	2002	Founded
03	50	Number of employees
04	TRIDENTSYSTEMS.US	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Brandon Wright

Rupal Thanawala moved from India to America in 1996 at an auspicious time. "Corporations were under tremendous pressure to differentiate, exceed Wall Street and customer expectations, and comply with government regulations in a highly competitive environment," she recalls. "I knew that technology could be a key enabler for corporate success. It was true 20 years ago, and it's true today."

With a keen focus on SAP solutions (Systems Applications and Products in data processing), Thanawala established Trident Systems in 2002 to provide robust business IT strategies and innovative digital consulting to a global roster of clients.

The trident (or trishula), a three-pronged tool of a Hindu deity, is a nod to Thanawala's cultural heritage, and seems fitting for her multi-pronged approach to problem solving. Trident's scope of service includes e-invoicing, governance risk and compliance, validation and testing, and robotic process automation across diverse industries. With 50 remote employees, the company has a presence in 10 countries.

"First and foremost, we are problem solvers," she says. "We take time to understand what the problem is, we build a road map to follow, and we transform the problem with a technology solution."

A lot has changed for would-be entrepreneurs since Thanawala launched Trident. "The Indiana business climate for startups has grown by leaps and bounds," Thanawala attests. "We started out as a two-person company and there weren't as many resources available then. It's much easier to start a business here now than it was two decades ago."

As Trident grew, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce was instrumental in helping Thanawala navigate challenges like securing loans and setting up health insurance for employees. She's also found the Launch Fishers coworking space to be a valuable asset. "I can work here without having to worry about signing a lease and paying rent," she notes.

To give back to the community that's supported her throughout the life of Trident Systems, Thanawala participates in local civic groups, offers wisdom through speaking engagements, and mentors aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly young women and people of color.

"I want to use the platforms I have to encourage and empower others, and show them the possibilities that are out there," she says.

38
YEAR TRACK RECORD OF DELIVERING INNOVATIVE SERVICES

“ THERE ARE A LOT OF NAYSAYERS OUT THERE. DON'T LISTEN TO THEM.”



UNABIKER

BRIAN BENNETT

01	WALTON	City
02	2001	Founded
03	1	Number of employees
04	UNABIKER.COM	Web

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Brandon Wright

BRIAN BENNETT IS PROTECTING MOTORCYCLISTS.

Some say necessity is the mother of invention. In Brian Bennett's case, it was a dirt bike crash. After wrecking in 2001, Bennett saw an opportunity to build a better radiator guard.

"I went shopping for parts and wasn't very impressed with what was available on the market," he recalls. "I worked in IndyCar making test parts, so I was very comfortable with fabrication, and I've got a degree in industrial design. Those worlds collided at the perfect time."

Proudly displaying his first creation on social media, Bennett soon found himself inundated with requests from fellow bikers. He began producing guards out of his 3,200 square-foot home shop as a side hustle, eventually leaning full throttle into Unabiker in 2003.

"At first I was basically just [making parts] to support my own dirt bike habit and cover race entry fees," he laughs. "Then it got to the point where I was having more fun — and making more money — at this than I was at my day job."

With skid plates and apparel added to the product lineup, Unabiker now enjoys national

distribution in motorcycle shops around the country and claims customers across six continents.

"I've got a great business advisor," Bennett credits. "Lita Rouser is my local [Indiana Small Business Development Center, SBDC] contact. She's been a phenomenal resource who listens to what I'm doing, provides feedback, and has helped me make connections with other businesses."

Thanks to Rouser's nomination, Unabiker was recently named the 2023 Hoosier Heartland Small Business of the Year. Bennett also received helpful support through the SBDC's Digital Ready Business course and from his Indiana Motorsports Association colleagues. He stays visible in the industry by sponsoring several Indiana dirt bike series and personally continuing to race.

"To be able to do this as a profession and feed my family is pretty cool," he admits. "If you believe in your product and think you can make a go of it, you're probably right."

2023
SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR
HOOSIER HEARTLAND INDIANA SBDC

“ FAMILY VALUES AND LOYAL CLIENTS ARE WHAT'S SUSTAINED OUR STEADY GROWTH.”

INDIANA HAS ALWAYS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF US.

WSI TECHNOLOGIES

WRITTEN BY AMY LYNCH

PHOTOGRAPHED BY Brandon Wright

Established primarily as a sales organization in 1977, WSI Technologies has evolved into a trusted provider of technology solutions to the public safety market. Once offering analog technologies to healthcare and legal clients, WSI now provides digital data communication and storage to government, public safety sector, and justice system entities and institutions.

"We started out in the healthcare and legal markets, over time moving into government, the public safety sector and the justice system," says WSI Technologies President Jim Halsmer.

WSI enhances workplace efficiency and effectiveness by offering reliable audio-visual-data recording services and management of highly critical data. The company's products, iRecord and Evertel, deliver premier and compliant hardware and software that streamline communications, improving collaboration, and helping improve access to justice. With WSI's digital solutions, public safety professionals can focus on what's most important — the organizations and communities they serve.

Headquartered in Indianapolis with satellite offices in Chicago and Florida, WSI services a global customer base of nearly 2,500 active clients each year with support and input from local and statewide organizations.

Earlier this year, WSI was awarded Small Business of the Year by the Indiana Small Business Development Center, a program within the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC). The company received the prestigious award because of its integral mission,

leadership, and impact in the areas of child advocacy, judicial system integrity and public safety.

"The Indiana Small Business Development Center has been a great partner for us, and we've had a relationship with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation for almost ten years," says Halsmer. "My perception of the current Indiana business climate is good. It's a strong community of passionate entrepreneurs who are loyal to finding talent within the state."

WSI maintains close connections with law enforcement communities, including the Indiana Sheriffs' Association, the Indiana Association of Chiefs of Police, child advocacy groups, and the Indiana chapters of organizations such as the Association of Public Safety Officials (APCO) and the National Emergency Number Association (NENA).

Under the direction of new ownership as of 2020, Halsmer says WSI's outside sales team, technical operations staff, inside account managers, sales engineers, and administrators have worked collaboratively to grow the company's revenue approximately 40% — and employee base by 35% — over the past three years.

"Our current owners have provided extraordinary leadership and growth strategies," Halsmer says. "At the end of the day, our success depends on engagement with our employees and the ability to support our clients in the communities they serve."

JIM HALSMER

01	INDIANAPOLIS	City
02	1977	Founded
03	46	Number of employees
04	WSI-TECH.COM	Web

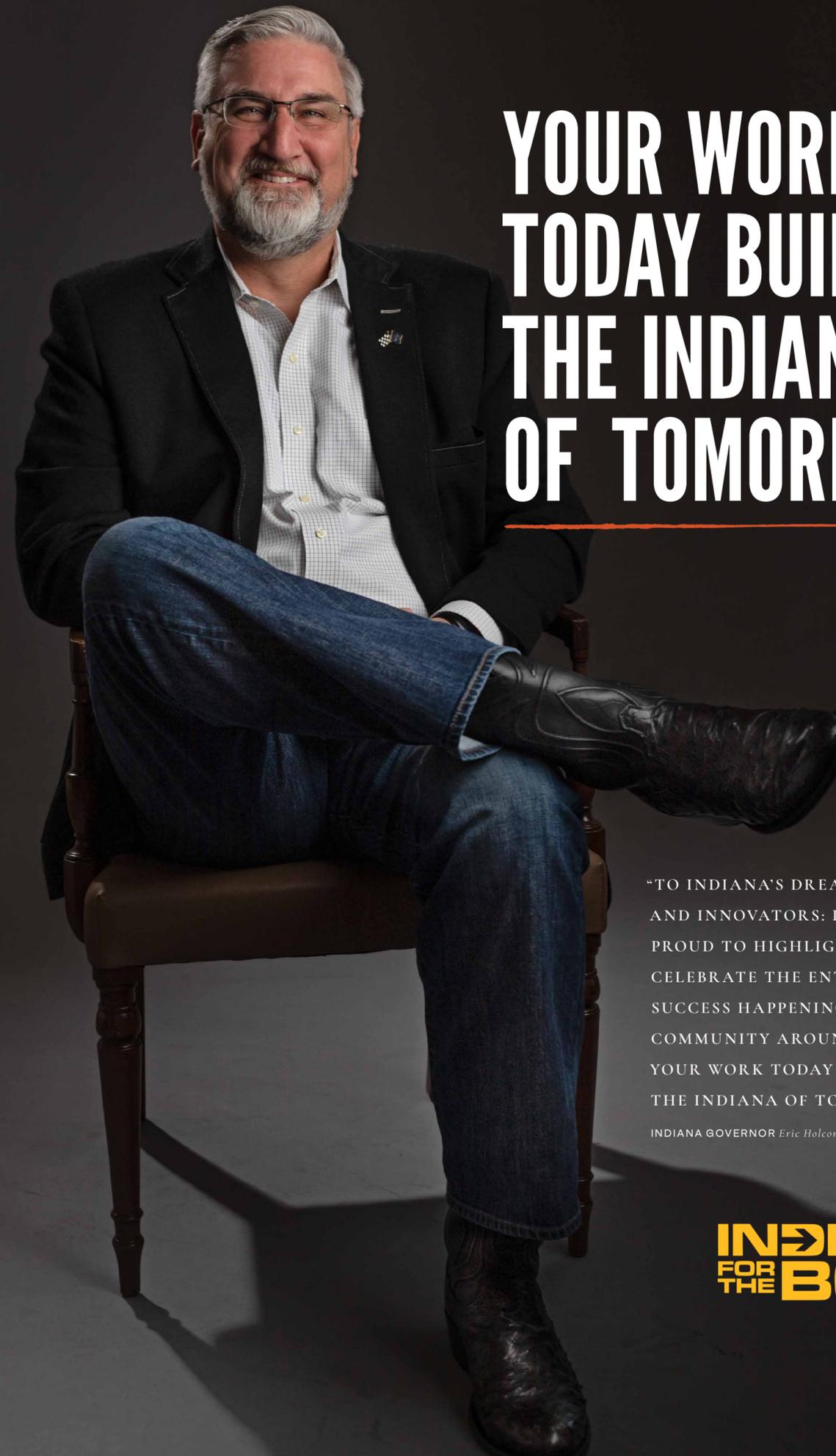
40%
REVENUE GROWTH OVER THE PAST 3 YEARS

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AND **EVERYTHING IN**
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**YOUR WORK
TODAY BUILDS
THE INDIANA
OF TOMORROW.**

“TO INDIANA’S DREAMERS, DOERS,
AND INNOVATORS: I AM EXTREMELY
PROUD TO HIGHLIGHT AND
CELEBRATE THE ENTREPRENEURIAL
SUCCESS HAPPENING IN EVERY
COMMUNITY AROUND THE STATE.
YOUR WORK TODAY BUILDS
THE INDIANA OF TOMORROW.”

INDIANA GOVERNOR *Eric Holcomb*

**INDIANA
FOR
THE BOLD**



INDIANA
FOR THE BOLD